

Call of the Devotee

Swami Ramdas

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CALL OF THE DEVOTEE

2471

(In continuation of
"In the Vision of God")

By
SWAMI RAMDAS

KOVILUR MADALAYAM,
ANDAVAR MANDRAM,
KOVILUR. B. O.
(VIA) MANAGIRI,
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Om Sri Ram jai Ram jai jai Ram

Let your heart be ever
filled with the sweetness
of Ramnam.

All joy and peace to
you.

Hearty Blessings

Ramesh
13. 4. 57



BELOVED PAPA, SWAMI RAMDAS

PREFACE

One may ask why the present book goes by the name "Call of the Devotee". The name just fits in for the tour of 1936, occasioned by the call of Pestonji Pirojsha of Bombay, who was so eager to see Ramdas, but was unable to come to the Ashram owing to illness. Then, again, the second and third tours became possible by the ardent request of the devotees of Sholapur, Bombay, Karachi, U. P., Bengal, Kashmir and other places. The 1949 tour was the result of a pathetic call of the ailing prince Pratapsinh of Limbdi who had come to Bangalore for a change. Until Ramdas left Anandashram on these tours, he had hardly any idea about leaving the Ashram. He used to say that God did not will that he should move out of the Ashram. These calls came to him almost suddenly, without any previous notice. Ramdas could not resist them; he had simply to bow to the will of God, who commanded him to respond immediately.

The devotee's call is as good as God's call. In Ramdas' divinized and all-comprehensive vision, God and His devotee are one. It is God who controls Ramdas' life. Every little or great action of his is actuated by God, who dwells within him and everywhere.

Ramdas

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TOUR - 1936

I

BOMBAY

In April 1936, Ramdas received a letter from the sister of Pestonji Pirojsha of Bombay that her brother was badly suffering from jaundice and that blessings be sent for his recovery. The letter came one evening and Ramdas informed Mataji of its contents. The following morning she enquired of him as to what reply he was going to give to the letter. Ramdas said he was thinking of sending a wire of blessings for the friend's recovery. She at once said, "You know that Pestonji has been thirsting for your Darshan for a long time, and has invited you on several occasions. In this hour of his serious illness, it is but proper that you should go and bless him in person and also thereby fulfil his long cherished desire". Now the die was cast. Ramdas who had at the will of Ram refused to move out of the Ashram for about seven years, in spite of the repeated calls of friends from various provinces, started straightaway and within an hour, he was at the railway station. He took with him nothing but a spare Kaupin and a small bag which he hung on his shoulder under the loose cloth that covered the upper part of his body.

Escape

At the Victoria Terminus, Ramdas was welcomed by a large group of devotees. On arrival at Pestonji's place, Ramdas had a hearty embrace from Pestonji. Then Bhajan, Puja and distribution of Prasad took place. On completion of the Bhajan, U. Sanjiva Rao requested Ramdas to go to his house for the night, as it was Ekadasi and they had arranged a Bhajan. At Sanjiva Rao's, the Bhajan went on with great enthusiasm, till a late hour in the night. Even after that, Ramdas went on talking to some select devotees who stayed in the house. In the

course of the talk, he told them in a humorous vein, the circumstances that had led to his leaving the Ashram, ending with these words: "When Mataji suggested that he should come to this city, for the sake of Pestonji, he jumped at the idea, as he would no longer be tied down to the work of churning curds, which was his share of work in the Ashram at the time. He considered it as nothing short of a providential escape". This admission brought forth roars of laughter.

The next morning Ramdas went back to Pestonji's rooms in the car that was sent by him and returned to Sanjiva Rao's by half past eight. By this time, all the Bombay devotees, having got the news of Ramdas' arrival, had flocked at Sanjiva Rao's place. The rooms, the galleries, and every nook and corner of the house were occupied by them. After half an hour's Bhajan, Ramdas was asked by Sanjiva Rao to say a few words on Satsang. All were expectantly waiting to hear Ramdas, and there was perfect silence. Then two small boys started laughing, which led Ramdas to speak for an hour. Ramdas said:

"Look at these children, how happy they are! Satsang must have produced in them this joyous mood. Satsang is an important step in the evolution of the soul to its spiritual destiny. In the company of saints, an aspirant gets the impetus and inspiration to do all the needed Sadhana for self-purification, which is essential for the realization of the Divine. Saints have gone beyond the Gunas and the Dwandwas. Their vision is universal. They look upon all beings and creatures as the manifestations of their eternal Beloved. They live always in a state of super-consciousness. The easy method of concentration on the supreme goal - God - is to chant constantly His sweet holy Name. The Name is sweeter than nectar. Its votary enjoys ineffable bliss." At the end of the talk, Ramdas requested the audience to sing Ram Nam for ten minutes. The function came to a close with Arati and distribution of Prasad.

Three types of people

One afternoon, when he was spending the day with Pestonji as usual, many Parsi friends came. Among them a young

Parsi lady was much attracted to Ramdas, when she first saw him, and she made it a point to come to see him every day. In the course of the talk, she asked Ramdas the question, "Why do some people not aspire for God, and even if they do so, why can they not easily fix their minds on Him?"

Ramdas, in reply, quoted the parable, often related by Sri Ramakrishna, about the three kinds of people, who were like the mudworm, the housefly and the honey-bee. He said, "There are some whose minds are always revelling in thoughts of sense-pleasures, like the mudworm which wallows in dirt and finds its pleasure only in it. The worm feels quite miserable when it is taken out and placed in a clean spot. So, persons of this type, when they find themselves in the company of saints, feel very uncomfortable. The second class is like the housefly which takes pleasure in sitting on fragrant and delicious dishes as also on dirt and filth. Aspirants of this type find delight in the society of saints as also in the enjoyment of the senses. The third type of aspirant is like the honey-bee which seeks only honey and sits on sweet-smelling flowers and sucks the nectar from them - it is never attracted by anything filthy. The aspirants who are like the honey-bee find joy only in the contact of saints and in the remembrance, meditation and service of God. They have no craving for sense-pleasures. Their one, all-consuming aspiration is for God-vision and nothing else. In chanting His Name they are raised to a state of perfect joy and peace."

On Ramdas' coming to the end of this discourse, the young lady promptly exclaimed: "Then, I am the housefly, for now I am going to a cinema." This remark evoked laughter from the assembled visitors.

I am the Peacock

Another day, a Parsi devotee jocularly remarked, pointing to this lady, "What is the secret of this girl coming to see you every day, almost at the same hour?" To this, Ramdas' reply was: "She is like the peacock of the story. A Sadhu was living in a hut on the borders of a forest and was given to taking opium. One evening, a peacock came to him dancing. This

was the time when the Sadhu took his dose of opium. While doing this, he offered a pellet of opium to the peacock, which swallowed it. Soon after, the peacock having got intoxicated, started dancing in great glee, and went away. The next day, exactly at the same hour, the peacock was at the hut, ready to receive a pellet again." At this point, the young lady interjected, "I am that peacock!" Thereafter, she was nicknamed "Peacock." Whenever she came to Pestonji's place, she was greeted with that name.

Teachings of Krishna and Christ

Whenever Ramdas was invited for Bhajan and Bhiksha, to the houses of devotees, he was invariably asked to deliver a discourse on some spiritual subject, selected by the host. He spoke mainly on three topics - Ram Nam, Satsang and the goal of life. For self-purification, Ramdas emphasized, there was no simpler way than the chanting of the Divine Name. In the society of saints, God who resided in the heart of the aspirant, gradually revealed Himself. The experience of the devotee's union with God was simply wonderful. The devotee felt that he was one with the Beloved and was still His lover. In his speeches, Ramdas compared and reconciled the teachings of Krishna and Christ. Krishna said that the highest vision was to realize God within oneself as well as in all beings and creatures. Christ taught, "The Kingdom of God is within you"; "Love thy neighbour as thyself". Here, Ramdas pointed out, "thyself" should have a capital S in self, as it stood for God Himself. This command of Christ could be put into practice only if you beheld the Divine in your neighbour, even as you were conscious of Him in yourself.

Value of suffering on the spiritual path

When Ramdas was wandering as a beggar, having God's name always on his lips, some of his relatives and friends were feeling great sympathy for him for his life of hardship and destitution. Referring to this, Ramdas observed they did not know that Ramdas was all the time enjoying a rare bliss and peace, undreamt of by the greatest monarchs in the world. Often, sufferings and tribulations really help in bringing us nearer to

God, and enabling us to enjoy sweet communion with Him. And, to drive home this truth, he told the devotees the story of Kunti Devi, the mother of Pandavas. When she was in great trouble, she took refuge in Lord Krishna, and had always His sweet name on her lips. Gradually, she got over her fears and a strange peace and joy filled her heart. After winning the Mahabharata war and installing her son Yudhishtira on the throne, Krishna went to take leave of her before departing for Dwaraka and wanted her to ask Him for a boon. She replied calmly, "Oh Lord, give me difficulties and tribulations so that I and my children may continue to remember You. In our days of sorrow we remembered You and are thus enjoying everlasting peace, crowned with your radiant Darshan." Kunti thus prayed for adversity in order that she may ever remain absorbed in the thought of God. How blessed, then, those must feel to whom God sends sufferings, unasked!

A lubricant for the mind

One day Ramdas had an invitation for Bhiksha from a very devout Parsi lady, Mrs. Gulmai Gazdar. She received Ramdas with great love. After food she had some talk with him on spiritual matters. She confessed that her mind was often sluggish, as if the mental machinery refused to move. She wanted some lubricant which could make it run smoothly in the direction of God. Ramdas replied, the most effective lubricant was God's Name, and such a lubricant was always at hand. Now, when this talk was going on, Ramdas sitting on a cot, and the Parsi mother on a chair in front of him, overhead was an electric fan working. At this point of the talk, by a strange coincidence, four or five drops of oil fell down from the motor of the electric fan. Immediately, Ramdas remarked, "Here is the lubricating oil you have been wishing to have." We had a hearty laugh and the mother was almost in ecstasies.

The place of wars in the Divine Scheme

Another day, Ramdas was invited by G. Ramaswamy, brother of Balaji, the manager of Anandashram. After the usual welcome, Ramdas was asked, in the course of the talks, why God should allow wars to take place. Ramdas replied, "It is

an incontestable fact that nothing happens except by God's will. God is an all-powerful, all-wise and all-merciful parent and guardian of the worlds. He knows how best to adjust the forces that work in the world and nature. Whenever we look upon any problem relating either to an individual in particular, or to mankind in general, we should do so in its proper setting against the background of the cosmic scheme. These problems must not be viewed by themselves alone. Even with regard to the Abyssinian war, then going on, Ramdas contended, God's will alone was responsible. He said: "All things happen according to His inscrutable will. In the divine scheme there is room also for the law of Karma. Man reaps as he sows. This truth applies in all cases whether of individuals or nations, and at all times."

G. Ramaswamy had arranged for a discourse and Bhajan to be held at Astika Samaj, Matunga. During the short discourse delivered on the occasion, Ramdas explained the true meaning of the word Dharma and pointed out how Dharma was a means to liberate oneself from the clutches of one's lower nature made up of the Gunas, and realize God as the Deity of one's own heart. He summed up the discourse with the injunction, "The first duty of every one is to understand the significance of the teaching 'Know Thyself.'"

After a few days, on the invitation of N. M. Haldipur, Ramdas paid a visit to Sadbhakti Mandir of Jogeshwari, a suburb of Bombay. Ramdas had a hearty embrace from the saint of the Mandir, Sri Mangesh Ramchandra Taki, known as Sri Dada. Pressed by the devotees Ramdas delivered a short discourse on the subject of Divine Love. The hall of the Mandir was filled with devotional rapture. Sri Dada also spoke on devotion, in his inimitable Marathi interspersing his talk with choice songs of Maharashtra saints. After the discourse, there was a brief conversation between Sri Dada and Ramdas. Then Sri Dada took Ramdas to the sacred room in which the relics of his father and Guru, Sri Ramchandra Shankar Taki Maharaj were carefully preserved. There were also paintings of the Maharaj in that room. Ramdas found that the atmosphere within was highly pure and spiritual. The function terminated with Arati and Prasad.

Secret of Happiness

On another occasion, Rao Saheb G. V. Madurkar invited Ramdas to Alibag. He was treated with great love by the Rao Saheb and his devoted wife, Saraswatibai. Here also Ramdas was asked to speak on the Aim of Life. In the course of his speech, Ramdas said: "Man tries to get peace and happiness. To achieve this purpose, he engages himself in the pursuit of name, fame, wealth and other sense-enjoyments. But he soon finds out that this is not the way to get what he wants. Saints teach that real happiness can be got only by surrendering ourselves at the feet of the Lord. The Lord is not far away from us, in distant caves, temples or hills. He is the Deity residing in our own hearts. It is by realizing His presence there, within us, that we are liberated from the worldly illusions. The qualities that we should cultivate in order to have His Darshan are love, compassion and forgiveness. To develop these qualities, we should purify our minds by constantly repeating Ram Nam. It is through love and love alone, that our vision expands, and we entitle ourselves to the grace of God. It must not be forgotten that Satsang or the society of saints is essential for the development of love, pure and selfless, for the devotee to get God's Darshan."

II

AHMEDABAD

The next place Ramdas visited was Ahmedabad. Ramdas was there as the guest of Mahant Rampratapdasji, in his Trandevi Mandir. Here all the inmates and Sadhus were extremely kind to him.

A Mahant's plight

Ramdas has to mention here a unique incident that took place in this visit relating to another Mahant of Ahmedabad. A few days after Ramdas' arrival at the Mandir, the host, Rampratapdasji, was informed that a wealthy Mahant, living a mile away was seriously ill and that his condition was so grave that it was only a question of a few hours with him. On hearing this,

the host's heart went out to the dying Mahant. He wished that the latter should have Darshan of Ramdas and a few words of solace from him in his last moments. Immediately, a tonga was hired and Ramdas was taken to the dying Mahant's place. The Mahant was found lying on a cot surrounded by his disciples. Rampratapdasji introduced Ramdas to the patient and told him that at that closing hour of his life, he should direct his mind to God and give up all clinging to the transitory things of the world. The ailing Mahant was conscious but in great pain. He had a bunch of keys in his hand which slipped on the bed, every now and then, as in his agony he was rolling from one side to the other. As soon as the bunch of keys fell out of his hand, he would cry out, "Where are my keys gone?" And when they were placed again in his hand, he would close his fingers on them hard and tight. The bunch contained the keys of the iron safe, in which all the money he possessed was safely kept. The dying Mahant was unable to take his mind off his rich treasure. He had hardly any inclination to look at Ramdas or to think of God. Rampratapdasji was greatly disappointed and said, "Oh, what a fate!" Then, the party returned to Tran-devi Mandir. On reaching the Mandir, within an hour, news came that the ailing Mahant had expired.

III

LIMBDI

From Ahmedabad Ramdas went to Viramgam, Wadhwan and Limbdi. At Limbdi, on a previous occasion when he parted from Shabarimai - the sugarcandy mother - he had asked her to repeat Ram Nam some lakhs of times and had told her that when she completed the number, he would come to her again. She had finished the stipulated Japa and was expecting Ramdas. Ramdas was on his way to her cottage and the mother was awaiting his arrival at a place where four roads met. When Ramdas came near, the old, old mother Gangamai, who could hardly walk owing to her advanced age, threw away the stick which supported her, and rushed towards him, giving him a hearty embrace. In a stuttering voice she said, "Oh, my Be-

loved, so at last I have met you again." Ramdas was thrilled. The kind Shabarimai had specially purchased milk on the previous night and had prepared buttermilk out of it for Ramdas. She had also got all the articles of Puja ready.

Glory to Shabarimai

When Ramdas went to her house, she seated him on a bench decorated in her own humble way. Ramdas soon found that, through excessive joy, Shabarimai was almost unconscious of her body and her surroundings. She sat down still, in a state of trance, for several minutes, while all those who came with Ramdas were waiting expectantly for the Puja. When she partially came to herself, she found that she was not able to stand or do the Puja. She asked Kantilal and Maganlal, who were then in the party, to do the Puja for her. After the Puja Ramdas left the place when the mother was still in the same semi-conscious state. When Ramdas had gone about ten yards from her cottage, she suddenly woke up, to find that Ramdas had not tasted the buttermilk that she had specially prepared as an offering to him. She rushed to the door and cried out to Maganlal to bring back her Ram, for taking it. Ramdas retraced his steps to the mother's place, and after drinking the buttermilk, departed from there. All glory to Shabarimai!

IV

DHANDUKA

Revaben was the kind mother who drew Ramdas from Limbdi to Dhanduka. She was a widow who worked as a school mistress in the local girls' School. Her entire life was dedicated to God. Purity radiated from her face. Ramdas spent a few blissful days in her house, which was also occupied by her brother and his family. In the evenings, Ramdas was asked questions on various spiritual subjects by the assembled devotees. One put him the question, "What should be done for attaining salvation?" He replied, "Ramdas is always amused when people ask such a question. You are He yourself, and you ask for the way of salvation. It is all your Lilal!"

Another time, replying to a similar question, Ramdas said: "Take any name of God you like and repeat it constantly. The Name will enable you to attain salvation. While repeating the Name, bear in mind that Ram, whose Name you are chanting, is your own real being. Ram dwells within you; you are His temple."

Ramdas also observed, in reply to another question, "The world cannot be unreal. It all depends on the meaning we attach to the word 'Real'. All things last for some length of time. It is not proper to call the world an illusion." Ramdas said, "A person has to pass through many stages before he attains perfection. There are different planes to cross and they become finer and finer as he progresses, until he reaches that subtlest spiritual realm, called the Bhuma, the abode of perfect bliss." Ramdas told another devotee, "Flowers are placed on a saint's head while performing his Puja, because the Sahasradala Chakra is located there. It is the abode of God."

An emotional outburst

Lakshmidas Maniar was a devotee of a unique type. At the least touch of emotion, he used to go off like a dynamite. Emotion virtually drowned him, and thereafter he seemed to be totally unaware of what he talked and did. One day, there was Bhajan as usual, and talks went on and on till a late hour in the night. As Ramdas was sitting continuously for a long period, the devotees made him lie down on a cot in the front yard, and massaged his tired body. When this was going on, another devotee, Popatbhai, sang some Gujarati songs and Stotras. The condition of Lakshmidas was already tense with emotion. Popatbhai's songs broke all barriers and Lakshmidas started sobbing and behaving in a queer manner. Suddenly he jumped from the verandah into the yard and made for Ramdas, with outstretched hands, as in a delirious state. In a moment, Lakshmidas fell heavily on Ramdas' chest, his body weighing nearly twelve stones. For Ramdas, the weight was too much. He tried to raise the devotee, using both his hands, but failed. Meanwhile Lakshmidas had become unconscious. The friends sitting by Ramdas' side and others standing round were silently looking at the fun. Ramdas made signs to them to lift the

heavy load pressing upon his chest. Then two of the friends near him tried in vain to lift Lakshmidas, and had to call for the help of another. Then the three together managed to pull Lakshmidas away. Ramdas' breathing, which had almost stopped, was now resumed. Lakshmidas, not yet normal, was sobbing and crying loudly. Popatbhai, singing with his eyes shut and not knowing what was going on, was continuing his Stotras. Maganlal asked him to stop. When the singing ceased, Lakshmidas became calm and laying himself down, fell fast asleep. Then followed loud snoring by the friend. In fact, Revaben's house was converted into a sawmill for that night. Next morning, news came to Ramdas that Lakshmidas was sitting up, absorbed in meditation. The friends were anxious about him. Ramdas assured them he would be all right.

Ramdas left Dhanduka for Bombay on his way South.

V

ERNAKULAM

From Bombay Ramdas came down to Palghat where he was the guest of Dr. S. R. U. Savoor. After a brief stay here, he proceeded to Ernakulam, where he stayed with P. Sanjiva Rao. Every day the devotees of the place used to ply Ramdas with questions which he answered in his usual humorous vein. Among these devotees was a Roman Catholic friend, who was coming to Ramdas covertly, afraid of the displeasure his visit to a Sannyasin might cause to his parish priest. He came along with a Hindu friend who was wellknown for his witticisms. The Christian friend asked Ramdas why he felt giddy while meditating on God. Before Ramdas could give him a reply, the Hindu companion shot out, "A dose of castor oil will cure you of the trouble." On hearing this, all present had a hearty laugh. The Christian devotee sat still, with a wry face, looking askance at his friend.

An Abuse of Satsang

A Vaishnava devotee, Narayana Bhat, used to come every day to see Ramdas. He was something of a Sanskrit scholar

and could quote profusely from Srimad Bhagavatam. He was very Sattvic in temperament and liked to talk only of devotion to Krishna, and when he did so, he would go into raptures. He stood in bold relief against the many visitors, who came to Ramdas for narrating their petty domestic troubles and who would even go on talking about the construction of septic tanks in their houses and such other matters which cannot, by any stretch of imagination, have any bearing on spirituality. To indulge in worldly talks in the presence of saints is a gross abuse of Satsang.

From Ernakulam Ramdas returned to Anandashram.

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TOUR - 1937

VI

SHOLAPUR DISTRICT

Ramdas started from the Ashram again in 1937 for a tour in Sholapur District. This was in response to an invitation of the devotees in that district. He was travelling alone in the third class. A young Madrasí who was travelling in the same compartment with Ramdas was restless. He was casting fearful glances towards the platform whenever the train halted at a station. Ramdas had marked the strange behaviour of the young man. When the train was nearing Sholapur, Ramdas wanted to know the cause of his fear, called him to his side and asked him what the matter was. The youth replied, "I am proceeding to Bombay for a job. Having no money for the railway fare, I have ventured to travel without a ticket and I am anxious not to be caught. I am terribly afraid of the railway officers."

It was a touching tale. God willed that Ramdas should provide him with a ticket from Sholapur station to Bombay. When the ticket was placed in his hands, his erstwhile careworn and haggard face now reflected immense relief with which were also mingled feelings of gratitude.

Almost all devotees from different villages in Sholapur district had gathered together to receive Ramdas at the railway station. Among them was Rao Bahadur R. H. Page, retired Superintendent of Police, a new friend whom Ramdas met here for the first time. Ramdas was taken by Rao Bahadur Page to his fine bungalow. Page and his wife welcomed him and treated him with great hospitality. Ramdas stopped with him only for the night. Early next morning he left with the devotees for Uple-Dumala, promising Page that he would spend some days with him on his return from the tour of the villages.

Uple-Dumala

Ramdas' stay at Uple-Dumala was arranged at the house of Jahagirdar Sri Krishnaji Pandharinath Ghate. Krishnaji gave a feast to all the residents of the village and the visitors who came from the surrounding villages to see Ramdas. They might have altogether numbered over fifteen hundred. Among these were people of all castes including Harijans. It was a most joyful sight to see the Lord eating through hundreds of mouths. Ramdas was simply thrilled at the sight.

When Ramdas was taken for the midday meal and rest to Jahagirdar Sri Ganpat Rao's house, the host put him some questions, of which one was: "Is it possible to practise compassion (Bhutadaya) always?" Ramdas replied, "True compassion is born of selflessness, the expression of which is self-sacrifice." Here Ramdas related the following Puranic story.

Story of Yudhishtira's Yagna

Soon after the end of the Mahabharata war, Yudhishtira performed the Rajasuya Yagna to which he invited sages, saints, kings, Brahmins and poor people residing throughout his empire. The celebration was on a grand scale. At the termination of the Yagna, thousands of people, assembled for the occasion, were sumptuously fed. Lord Krishna Himself took part in serving food to the guests and also in removing the leaves on which meals were taken.

Suddenly, a mongoose that had half its body shining like gold appeared and started rolling on the leaves left after meals row after row. Both Yudhishtira and Krishna witnessed this strange scene. Yudhishtira out of curiosity, asked Krishna if he could throw light on the curious behaviour of the mongoose. Krishna asked the king to get the reason for its conduct from the mongoose itself which was endowed with the power of speech by Krishna. Yudhishtira called the mongoose to his side and inquired why it was rolling on the leaves. The mongoose replied:

"Once, in the place where I lived, there occurred a severe famine. People were dying of starvation. I was hiding in the house of a poor, honest, kind-hearted devotee of God, who lived

with his wife and son. This family too had no food for several days, and they were on the verge of death. In this critical condition, a man entered the house with a pot of rice, and placing it before the dying family, disappeared. With great difficulty the three raised themselves up, and dividing the food in three parts, were about to take it. Now, a man, famished through extreme starvation, while passing by the house, saw the food and came tottering in. He begged in a most appealing tone that some food be given to him also.

"The father at once passed on his share of the food to him. The other two, seeing this act of the father, sat silently watching. The man finished what was given to him, and, looking hungrily at the food before the other two members of the family, said "How I wish I could get one more share!" At once the mother gave away her share to him. Even after taking this, the man's hunger was not appeased. He looked covetously at the remaining portion of the food. This was also cheerfully given away by the son. The man having had his fill, departed. Then the father, mother and son fell down unconscious and expired. I was both amazed and delighted to witness this scene of a rare and wonderful act of self-sacrifice. I saw some grains of that rice - remnants of the meal - on the floor. I went up to the spot and rolled on it, when, lo! as a result, half my body turned lustrous like gold. From that time onwards, my one ambition has been to get the other half of the body also similarly transformed by the touch of such sacred particles.

"I have gone all over the world, wherever great feasts have been held by philanthropic persons, and rolled my body on the leavings of the food, but to my disappointment, I have failed to gain my object. I heard that you, the great Yudhishtira famous on earth as an ideal man of righteousness and generosity, were performing a great Yagna and would be feeding millions of people. I felt elated with the hope that now, at long last, my long-cherished desire would be fulfilled. You saw how I rolled on the remnants of the food served here. But, alas! again nothing has happened!"

Yudhishtira who heard this story from the lips of the mongoose, hung down his head in shame. For, when the feed-

ing was going on, he had become proud of it and felt that there was no other person in the world as great as he. When this was noticed by the omniscient Lord Krishna, he taught his disciple a lesson, by enacting this play of the mongoose.

At Uple-Dumala Ramdas had to visit a number of houses daily, where he was welcomed with open arms. Sometimes, he had to run from one house to another in order to satisfy as many devotees as possible, during the day. Also, in response to an invitation from the Harijans of the place, he went once to their colony along with the devotees of higher castes. There, all these devotees freely mingled with one another. He was invited to the house of a Muslim too who did Padapuja in the Hindu style, in which the Brahmins of the place assisted him.

The goal of life

Here also Ramdas delivered a speech in Hindi on the goal of life. The meeting was arranged by the devotees of the place. Ramdas said:

“Man’s goal is happiness. He thinks at first that he will get it by amassing wealth, name and fame. But by experience, he soon learns that he is going the wrong way. This disappointment leads him to saints, who have found the source of immortal happiness. It is by accepting their guidance that the aspirant discovers the true path, and following it up, attains the goal. Just as a man who wishes to go to Kashi, would get instructions about the way and the journey from one who has actually visited that holy city, so also the struggling aspirant has to look to saints for instruction. Saints are the beacons that point to the right path, leading to the ultimate state of absolute peace and joy which is really inexpressible. When the soul of man is completely immersed in the sea of bliss, he feels at times that he is veritably that sea itself, and lives, moves and has his being in divine existence. He now feels the presence of his Beloved every instant of his life. He beholds Him everywhere. When he reaches this state, he is said to have attained what is described in the Shastras as Sahaja Samadhi.”

Ekadasi, the eleventh day of the Hindu month, is considered by Hindus as a sacred day. This day is devoted, by a

true Vaishnava to the worship and remembrance of God, accompanied by a fast. The villagers, among whom Ramdas now lived, were all devotees of this type, and used to observe this day in the above manner. On the Dwadasi day, when Ramdas was taking his bath, he came to know that a devotee in the village was crying because Ramdas did not visit his house that day, during his morning rounds. He had wanted to break his fast only after having Ramdas' Darshan in his cottage. Finishing his bath quickly, Ramdas ran to the house of this devotee who was overjoyed at Ramdas' sudden appearance. Ramdas received his offerings and returned.

Ambejavalge

Here Ramdas met Premsingh again. This time also Premsingh came without leave, as he had done on the last occasion. Last time he was with Ramdas for nearly a month. But on his return to duty, he was neither dismissed nor even reprimanded for his absence without leave for such a long time. This time Ramdas sent him back the very next day after his arrival, saying, "One should not cast too heavy a burden on God, although God does protect those who rely on him." Premsingh was a gifted singer who knew Brahmanand's Bhajans; he sang them with a most melodious voice.

One remarkable event that happened here, as given out by the devotees, was that the food that was prepared only for a limited number, sufficed for a much larger number of people who came to dine, leaving a surplus too. Another noteworthy feature was that whenever Ramdas was leaving one village for another, the villagers, especially the devotees in the house in which he had lived, would start crying like children. Ramdas has gone over many places in India and witnessed the varied expressions of pure love overflowing the hearts of devotees. But what he saw here was simply unique. It was a flood of the purest emotion, in which Ramdas was carried away, filled with indescribable ecstasy. These simple country folk, unable to bear their separation from him, would follow him to the next village, giving up all thought of home and belongings. They were simply drawn away by a force which they did not seek to understand, but which they obeyed in a spirit of perfect self-abandon.

Blessed, indeed, is Sholapur - blessed is Maharashtra - blessed is India - nay, blessed is the Earth, where devotion fills the yearning hearts of devotees with the splendour of such pure sentiments.

Another interesting incident occurred at Ambejavalge. A devotee, Ramakrishna Hari, who got deeply attached to Ramdas during his last tour in Sholapur District, was somehow mysteriously led to the bus stand where Ramdas got down from a bus. Ramakrishna Hari was not aware of Ramdas' trip to Sholapur. Naturally, he was overjoyed to see Ramdas. For sometime he was unable to speak due to excitement. When he started speaking, he could do so at first only in monosyllables. He followed Ramdas to Yavli, the next place of halt.

Yavli

In Yavli, one Madhavrao, who was very learned in the Shastras, asked Ramdas why, in spite of his vast reading of religious literature, his mind was still restless. Ramdas, speaking in Hindi, told him that mere reading of scriptures was of little avail, but that one should try to put the teaching into practice. The Sadhana consisted in remembering God by taking His Name, so that one could easily surrender to Him. When the mind thought of God, the omnipresent Reality, egoism automatically disappeared, and along with it, all Vasanas. Then the mind became calm, serene and peaceful. Here, Ramdas compared the human body to a flute which is clogged with the dirt of the ego and desires. If you called upon Lord Krishna to take it and play on it His celestial music, He would not do so. When you removed the foreign material that clogged the human flute and made it clean and hollow by means of constant repetition of His all-powerful Name, then Lord Krishna would take it up and play on it, without even an invitation from you.

Meaning of Kaliya Mardan

Ramdas put the same truth in another way by referring to the episode of Kaliya in Krishna's life. The river Yamuna was the mind and the six-headed serpent Kaliya was the ego filled with the six evil qualities, nameiy, Kama, Krodha, Lobha, Moha,

Mada and Matsarya (desire, anger, greed, attachment, pride and jealousy). Kaliya, the ego, had poisoned the waters of Yamuna the mind. The cows, the Sattwic qualities, were almost dying, by the effect of this poisoned water. In this state, how can the helpless individual be redeemed? He sends forth an ardent cry to Lord Krishna to enter his mind, kill the six-hooded ego-serpent, purify the waters of the mind and revive the cows - the Sattwic qualities. So, to be free from the clutches of the ego, the aspirant should call upon the Lord to come to his rescue. This was the most natural, easy and simple way.

Some devotees complained to Ramdas that in the midst of their worldly duties, they could not find time to think of God. Ramdas told them: "This is not right. Think for yourself, how much time you waste in talking unnecessarily. If you keep a strict watch upon yourself, you will find that your actual working hours are only a few. You daily spend eight to ten hours in sleep, while you need only six hours. Besides, whenever you are free from work, you can keep your mind engaged in the remembrance of God and have His pure and glorious Name on your lips. Also, whenever you go from one village to another on foot, as you often do, you can chant the Name as you walk along. If you only make up your mind, you can find ample time during the day to remember Him."

Mohol

At Mohol, Ramdas was the guest of Babuji Moholkar. An Ayurvedic physician, Dr. Kuntekar, was a frequent visitor here. One day, when he was sitting with Ramdas, a woman came running and told the doctor that her child, whom he was treating, had a very high fever and that he should immediately go with her to examine the child. But the doctor was unwilling to leave the place. So, he told the mother to bring the child and place it at Ramdas' feet and that everything would be all right. The child was accordingly brought and placed before Ramdas for being blessed. Soon after the child was taken home, the report came that the temperature had come down. The doctor was very much relieved to hear the news; he had been feeling anxious about the child, as the nature of its illness was very serious.

Pandharpur

In this holy city, Ramdas and party were the guests of P. B. Bahirat. One evening, the party went to the banks of the Chandrabhaga river, and sat on the sands for some time. Here Ramdas' heart woke up to the sweet memories of the past, when he beheld the familiar scenes - the calm flow of the river, the tall turrets of the temples and the busy hum of the pilgrims who came to bathe in the sacred stream. Pandharpur is verily the home of saints. How many saints have trodden those sands! How many thousands of devotees have danced, on that spot, singing in ecstasy the name Vithal! Even when these saints and devotees were not present there physically, Ramdas felt their divinizing influence still pervading the place, sanctifying all those who breathed in that hallowed atmosphere. The devotees residing there, whose allegiance to God Vithoba is whole-hearted, declare that Pandharpur is the real Vaikuntha mentioned in the Puranas. He who is born and lives there becomes an eternal companion of God.

Angar

Here came Marutirao from Uppalai to see Ramdas. He was a wonderful exponent of the famous commentary on the Gita - the Jnaneshwari - by Sri Jnaneshwar Maharaj. He could speak eloquently in Marathi, explaining the meaning of any Sloka in the Bhagavad Gita. He gave some Pravachans here on the Gita and kept the audience spell-bound.

Before Ramdas closes the account of his tour in Sholapur District, he feels he should not fail to refer to the fervent manner in which these simple village folk would worship Ramdas doing Padapuja in the orthodox style. Some of them were so much over-powered by love and devotion that they forgot themselves and behaved in a strange manner. Thus at Kaudgaon, Ramdas was taken to the house of a devotee where many people had gathered for performing Padapuja. The time was short and the number of those who had prepared themselves to do the Puja was great. Above all, the fervour of these worshippers was tremendous. The Puja went on, one after another. One of the devout mothers brought all the articles of worship,

and placing them before Ramdas, was lost in a trance. Her attention had to be brought to her immediate task by repeated reminders.

She started the Puja. The Puja articles consisted of three kinds of fragrant powders, Tulsi leaves and flowers, milk, sugar, plantains and a pot of water, with a small brass lamp made up of cotton wick dipped in ghee. The usual procedure is to wash the feet with water, apply the fragrant powders, place Tulsi leaves on them, and towards the end of the Puja, before waving the light round the feet, to put sugar and milk into Ramdas' mouth. What happened was that the mother, forgetting herself, instead of applying the powders to the feet, placed sugar and poured milk on them and shoved the three fragrant powders into Ramdas' mouth. Ramdas quietly enjoyed the entertainment and swallowed the powders!

At some other places, they laid their heads on Ramdas' feet and fell into a trance so that, after some time, they had to be bodily lifted up and taken away. Their explanation, given later, was that they got so saturated with peace that they lost all thought of time and space. Similarly, Ramdas at some places found that devotees licked his big toes, and even went to the length of gently biting them.

Sholapur

During his stay at Sholapur town, hundreds of visitors used to come for Darshan. A pleader from Belgaum once asked Ramdas what the best method was for driving away unclean thoughts from the mind and also how to repeat God's name. Ramdas explained to him:

"God's name must be chanted with all love and faith. Then Vasanas drop out of the mind automatically, without any effort. God comes to the devotee when he cries to Him, just as a mother goes to her child. It is perfectly true to say that the easiest, shortest and quickest path to reach God is the repetition of His sweet and glorious name. Name makes the mortal immortal and changes man into God."

At Sholapur Ramdas was taken by several friends to their houses where they showered on him pure love and devotion.

He has to make particular mention here of his old friend K. D. Nerurkar. Ramdas met him now after a long, long time. He was Ramdas' friend when in his old life, he was in Bombay, undergoing a course of training in the Victoria Jubilee Technical Institute. The sight of him revived old and sweet memories, especially how the two lived together in the same room, loving each other more than brothers. Nerurkar took Ramdas to his house, having arranged a feast to which he invited many of his local friends. Soon after, Ramdas was asked to give a talk in English in a public hall. Then again, another day, he had to deliver a speech in a local temple in Hindi. The crowd on the latter occasion was so great that it was unmanageable.

Ramdas was staying at Sholapur in a small room on the first floor of Mr. Page's bungalow. The hall adjoining it was used for holding Bhajans and interviews in the evenings. In the morning, the hall was used also for Parayana or the reading of scriptures by a learned Pandit. One morning, as usual, the Pandit was reading Adhyatma Ramayana in the original Sanskrit. He was simply reading the verses without translating them. Before the Pandit sat Page's wife, absorbed in listening to the Ramayana story. Page came to Ramdas' room on tiptoe and whispered to him, "Maharaj, come here. I shall show you a wonderful sight." Ramdas followed him. He was led to a door through which the scene in the hall was clearly visible. Pointing to his wife, he said, "Look here, Maharaj, my wife is so intently listening to the reading of the Sanskrit text of the scripture, as though she knows Sanskrit. The fact is that she does not know a word of it, and still see the devotion with which she is sitting there, like a statue. She does this punctually every day, for an hour or more. For myself, I can never dream of possessing a faith like hers."

The Mother's heart

Some other time, Page confided to Ramdas another interesting story about that devotee mother. He said: "As Superintendent of Police, I had to arrest and jail many thieves and robbers. One day, one of these - a thief recently released from jail - came to the front door of my bungalow and requested me for a meal. I recognized him. He was a strong, well-

built man, capable of earning his bread by honest labour. I told him, 'I cannot feed an able-bodied man like you. So, it will be well for you to depart in peace.' Then I entered the house, and after attending to some work for a few minutes, went to the kitchen to see my wife to consult her on some matter. What was my astonishment, when I saw the thief whom I had just met outside and turned out, sitting on the verandah of the kitchen served with a full meal, and eating with gusto! My wife, standing near him, was pressing him to have more food, and to have his fill. She was all love and hospitality. I remonstrated with my wife: "Do you know who that man is? He is a first class rogue. I had several times sent him to jail for theft. I refused to give him a meal when he approached me at the front door, and you are serving him here with food lavishly—a man who is strong enough to work for his bread!" She replied, with a fine smile on her face, "My rule is to feed any man who comes hungry to our door, whatever his nature or antecedents."

VII

BOMBAY - POONA

S. R. Deshpande had come from Mominabad to invite Ramdas to that place on behalf of Swami Ramanand Tirth. At Mominabad, Ramdas stayed with an intimate friend of Swami Ramanand. One day Ramdas and friends went on a long excursion and saw, on the brink of a deep valley, through which a stream was meandering, a small but well-preserved cave, said to have been once occupied by a great saint, named Mukundraj. The scenery all round the place was at once most enchanting and awe-inspiring. The party spent about three hours there, and then returned. Swami Ramanand Tirth was all love and affection for Ramdas. In fact, Ramdas and Ramanand had both been longing to see each other for a long time; so the meeting was most joyful. From Mominabad Ramdas came to Bombay.

Dr. Kombrabail

This time also in Bombay Ramdas paid a visit to the Sadbhakti Mandir at Jogeshwari. Sri Dada, as usual, welcomed

Ramdas with great love. Dr. R. Kombrabail invited Ramdas to his house for meals. Ramdas must avail himself of this opportunity to say a few words about Dr. Kombrabail. He was a saintly soul. He came in contact with a great saint of Maharashtra with the result that his life underwent a spiritual transformation. As a doctor, he did not take any fees from anyone for his services. His face was radiant with inner purity and peace. He endeared himself to everybody who came in touch with him. Devotion, renunciation and divine wisdom, were the usual subjects of his talks with his friends. He came to Anandashram twice. It is a matter for regret that such a saintly person departed this life so early.

Ramdas was invited to Poona by B. V. Deshmukh, a prominent advocate of the place. He took Ramdas directly from the station to a retreat some miles from Poona which he had named "Rambaugh". This retreat had been sanctified by the visits of many Sadhus and saints. The ideal of the centre as Deshmukh put it, was self-evolution through love and service. The centre was meant for persons of all castes and creeds. Ramdas stayed there for three days. At Rambaugh one afternoon, Ramdas was asked to deliver a discourse in Hindi on Bhakti. In the course of his address, Ramdas said that just as a house, in which a light was burning, kept away the thief, so also the person, in whose mind the Light of Divine Name ever shone, kept away the ego. To show what real and complete surrender to God meant Ramdas narrated a Puranic story:

When Shiva and Parvati were together in Kailas, Shiva heard a piteous cry from a devotee and left immediately, only to return in a few minutes. Now, Parvati asked him why he left suddenly and why he returned so quickly. To this, Shiva replied: "I came to know that a devotee of mine was in great distress. This devotee was passing through a forest and had with him a bundle containing all his wealth. He saw a thief coming towards him and was greatly frightened. In this perilous condition, he loudly called me for help. But, when I went there, I saw that without waiting for me, he was ready to protect himself, and had taken a big stone in his hand, which he was about to hurl at the thief. So I returned."

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Ramdas also narrated another story to illustrate what true devotion was. The great saint Narada once approached Lord Vishnu and asked, "Oh Lord, who is your greatest Bhakta?" The Lord asked him to go over to a poor farmer in a certain village who, He said, was His greatest Bhakta. Narada visited the village and saw the farmer. He observed nothing special about him. The only thing he could note was that the farmer used to repeat Ram Nam once in the morning before he started work and once in the evening before he retired, and for the rest of the day he was engaged in his daily work. Narada returned and said to the Lord, "What is the special trait of that farmer, which marks him out as the greatest devotee? He takes Your Name only twice, during the twenty-four hours of day and night, while I am always chanting it." The Lord replied, "Though he remembers me only twice a day and you do it always, you have to note that he does it in spite of his absorption in the farm and other activities all day long, while you have nothing to distract your mind from me. Another difference is that while you are proud and self-conscious of your devotion, the former is quite humble and ego-less."

VIII

COIMBATORE - PALGHAT

On his return journey from Poona after visiting Bangalore and Salem, Ramdas came down to Coimbatore. B. A. Padmanabha Iyer, an official of the Coimbatore Spinning and Weaving Mills, where Ramdas had been a Spinning Master in his old life, took him to the Mills. Ramdas went round, seeing the machines, vividly remembering the days passed here. Ramdas jocularly remarked that while in his earlier life he had been spinning thread and making cloth out of it, after his new birth, he has been spinning the glorious name of God, and producing the fabric of nectar and bliss.

From Coimbatore Ramdas went to Palghat, where he was the guest of Dr. S. R. U. Savor, who was then the Principal of the Government Victoria College. Ramdas stayed here for a week. The Bhajan held in Dr. Savor's house every day, was

attended by a large number of devotees of the place. In his talks with friends, Ramdas laid stress on the path of devotion. He held out that by Bhakti one could easily purge the mind of its petty desires, and rapidly march on to the feet of God. He also spoke on the need for service of humanity, based on an universal vision. Such service constituted the worship of God Himself. To surrender ourselves to Him was the aim. To become instruments in His hands was the means.

The bane of orthodoxy

A friend, belonging to a very orthodox Brahmin family, wished Ramdas to visit his house in the village nearby for a few minutes. Ramdas did so. Coming to know that the orthodox Brahmins of the place observed strictly the rules of caste, and looked down upon other castes, specially Harijans, Ramdas told the friends and others assembled there:

"You sit for hours in a room in your house, set apart for worship of your family Deity, and believe that your God is only in the image or the picture to which you do Puja. This kind of worship instead of releasing you from the fetters of ignorance, seems to be only tightening its chains more firmly on your soul. It is because of this narrow outlook widespread in the country that we find everywhere in India a state of religious decadence, and the true values of spiritual life are being ignored. Bigotry, intolerance, persecution are rampant. Religion, instead of becoming a cementing force to unite all communities, classes and nations into one homogeneous whole, has accentuated the differences, bringing about discord and confusion in the social and national life of the people. So, Ramdas' advice to you all is that you should turn your mind from the external to the internal and realize the oneness and unity of all beings, shedding the ignorance-born sense of diversity.

"You know that, even when you worship an image placed in front of you, you worship really not any external form as such, but the indwelling, all-pervading God or Atman, whose symbol the image is. So, in all worship, the idea of the external image has to be transcended in the end by realizing the Divine within. Remember God in your mind, and meditate on Him

in your heart, and realize Him. Slavish adherence to any rules of worship for a considerable time is more of a handicap than an aid to your spiritual evolution. Love should rule your heart and you should look upon all as your brothers and sisters. Verily, God is our parent, and we are all His children to whatever caste we belong. Such being the case, the feeling of separateness and division in our hearts on the score of race, nation, caste, creed or colour, has to be discarded as it is born of utter ignorance. So, give up all this, and rise to the height of an all-comprehensive unity and universal vision."

Address to students

On another day, Ramdas was taken by Dr. Savor to the Victoria College Students' hostel, where he spoke a few words to the inmates. Addressing the students, Ramdas said:

"To love God is to love our fellowmen, because God has made Himself manifest in all beings and creatures in the world. Service rendered to the poor is God's own service. Truly, God is not different from His creation, as waves are not different from ocean. It is the man-made distinctions that have been the cause of sorrow, pain and suffering in the world. We have to recognize that within us dwells the all-loving, ever-blissful and omnipotent Spirit. To realize this truth means to live in true harmony and peace."

Then Ramdas explained to the students the essential difference between a God-realized soul and an ordinary man. Ramdas illustrated the distinction by telling another story:

"A man who was of artistic temperament got one of his sitting rooms decorated with hundreds of mirrors, set at different angles. They were fixed to the four walls, to the ceiling and the floor, as also to the doors and window shutters. He closed the room, switched on the lights and beheld himself reflected in hundreds of mirrors. He was delighted at the sight. He enjoyed it for some time and then went out. Soon after, his dog entered the room. It saw itself multiplied into innumerable dogs reflected in the mirrors. The dog thought that its images were all real dogs. It started barking at them and when it saw the reflections also opening their mouths, it thought they too

were barking at him. Then started a regular fight, of course only one-sided. The dog jumped about in all directions till it got utterly exhausted and dropped down dead. The man of divine knowledge is like the man in this story who knows that all beings in the world are forms of his own Atman and lives in harmony with them, while the man of ignorance is like the dog who, not knowing this truth, lives in perpetual discord with his fellow-beings."

IX

ERNAKULAM - BACK TO ASHRAM

From Palghat Ramdas reached Ernakulam where he stayed with P. Sanjiva Rao. This time also, many friends came to see Ramdas at P. Sanjiva Rao's place.

One day, when Ramdas was narrating to the devotees here some incidents of his trip to Kathiawar, he made a special mention of a Pandit who had asked him why people, although they have heard and read many Shastras and had had the occasion to listen to the advice of saints, could not fix their minds on God. Ramdas then related the story he had given the Pandit in reply. Sri Ramakrishna used to narrate it to those who went to him for advice.

Parable of the monkey

A monkey was tied to a post in a small room by means of a long chain. Just above the post there was a niche in the wall. As the monkey was tied up there for a long time, the place got dirty and uncomfortable. The monkey wanted to get away, but, there was no means of escape except to jump up to the niche for relief. It had also a big stone tied to its waist. The monkey would take a leap and try to sit at ease in the niche. But the niche was too small to accommodate it along with the stone. The heavy stone hanging from his waist was also exerting a downward pull on it. So it could not sit there long and would fall down on the dirty floor. Every time it attempted to get relief this way, it had to be only for a short while. In the

same way, a man, when he sits down for meditation, striving to keep his mind concentrated on God, away from the unclean desires of the world, attains only a moment's communion with Him, and then the irresistible pull of Maya brings him down again into the darkness of ignorance.

By the repeated efforts of the monkey to find a steady and fixed place in the niche, the string with which the stone was tied to its waist got loosened and at last the monkey was free from this burden. Then it was easy for it to leap upward and take rest in the niche. Similarly, through constant meditation, the spiritual aspirant was able to break the bonds that bound him to the world and achieved steady communion with God.

At the end of his visit to Ernakulam, Ramdas returned to Anandashram.

TOUR - 1938

X

BOMBAY

Ramdas started on a third tour in January 1938 in response to the requests of friends living in Sind, the Punjab, Kashmir, United Provinces and Bengal. Before proceeding to the North, he decided to go to Bombay and stay for a few days there.

While in Bombay, at the request of Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Ramdas went to see him in his rooms. The meeting was a delightful one. In the course of his talk, the poet asked Ramdas, "Is it true that you receive worship from people?" Ramdas replied, "He accepts whatever is offered to him with love." Then, he held Ramdas in a tight embrace. Ramdas told him that he joyfully accepted his embrace also. We had a hearty laugh together.

Ramdas met here for the first time Principal N. B. Butani of Karachi as he came with V. G. Dalvi to Sanjiva Rao's where Ramdas was staying. Ramdas spent one day with V. G. Dalvi and in the evening, the latter had arranged a music concert by Pagnis, the well-known cinema actor, who played the part of Saint Tukaram. Pagnis was indeed a gifted singer. Not only was he a master in music, but he was also a devotee at heart. So, when he sang, he produced an atmosphere full of spiritual fervour. All enjoyed his Bhajan very much. At the close of it, Ramdas was asked to speak. He discoursed on the glory of the Divine Name. But, the manner in which he spoke was similar to the one in which he spoke once at the Government College at Mangalore. A torrent of words flowed out of him, for a time, and then he stopped.

This time also, Ramdas paid a visit to Jogeshwari. Ramdas spent an hour with Sri Mangesh Ramchandra Taki at the Sadbhakti Mandir. There was a discourse followed by a talk. From Jogeshwari, Ramdas went to Santa Cruz, where at M. M. Thakore's place, he spent a wonderful night.

XI

AHMEDABAD - KATHIAWAR

From Bombay Ramdas went to Ahmedabad accompanied by Gunvantrai Desai. At Gunvantrai's house, when he was sitting with others round a fire, it being very cold at that time, he told them a personal anecdote. Once, Ramdas was retiring to sleep, when Ram came to him and said, "Look here, Ramdas, I am the doer and not you." "Yes, Ram, Ramdas knows it well," Ramdas replied. Again Ram came to say the same thing, and Ramdas replied, "Yes, Ram, you are the doer and Ramdas never forgets it." But Ram came again and again and Ramdas got annoyed, for he was feeling sleepy. He turned to Ram, and said, "Look here, what's the joke? When did Ramdas ever claim to be the doer? Let him sleep in peace." But there was no peace for Ramdas. Again, the Divine Disturber came. But this time Ramdas was ready. As soon as Ram opened his mouth, Ramdas put into it a big piece of sugarcandy, that was lying nearby. Ram could not both eat and speak at once. So, while He was busy, enjoying sugarcandy, Ramdas fell fast asleep!

Once when Ramdas was sitting in the midst of his Ahmedabad friends, he suddenly proposed the question, "And what do you think of Ramdas?" One of them said he could not tell, while a mother replied, "You are concrete Anand." After a while, the same mother called him "Delhi-ka-Thug." For she said, "Ramdas, though simple, is also shrewd." Next, a question arose as to where Ramcharandas was. Ramdas spoke of his great love for him and his implicit obedience to Ramdas, and closed his talk with the remark, "No one knows where he is; he has completely vanished." On this, a friend remarked, "Cannot Ramdas know where Ramcharandas is?" "Ramdas knows and knows not," was his reply.

On another occasion, a friend asked Ramdas, "Did God create man or man create God?" Ramdas put the counter question, "Does the father create the son, or the son create the father?" When Ramdas was profusely garlanded with roses - it was the season of roses - he said, "You are all roses too, for you are all full of the fragrance of love." Then, one of the listeners shot out, "These roses have thorns, Swamiji." Ramdas, then said, "Ramdas is a bee that sits on the flower, and avoids thorns; and when he goes away, he removes the thorns also."

Ramdas was invited one day by Dewan Bahadur Ratilal J. Lakhia to his fine bungalow. Here he was accorded a hearty welcome by the friend. A Pandit, who came to have a discussion with Ramdas on Varnashram Dharma, asked if he approved of Mahatma Gandhi's movement for removal of untouchability. Ramdas said that he perfectly agreed with Mahatmaji in this matter, and arguing in favour of the reform, gave the example of Shabari. At this, the Pandit got irritated. Finding that reasoning, and citing of example of saints and great Avatars failed to convince the Pandit, Ramdas had to confess finally that he was only a Sadhu and not a Pandit. At this, the Pandit got still more excited and left the place - after taking some Prasad.

Another day, Ramdas visited Seth Govardhandas Parikh. This friend had almost lost his eyesight. He was a great devotee of Sri Krishna. He asked Ramdas several questions on the Gita. After Ramdas left the place, he seems to have told a friend that though due to his failing sight, he could hardly see, yet he saw Ramdas' figure as if it was composed of blazing light. Govardhandas believed that it was Sri Krishna Himself that he saw. Such was his devotion to the Lord! Here, Ramdas can quote another instance similar to this. Samarth Ramdas, the famous saint of Maharashtra, who was a great devotee of Sri Ramchandra, went for the Darshan of Vithoba at Pandharpur. The image of Vithoba represented Sri Krishna. When this saint stood before the image, he saw before him not Krishna, but his own Ishta-Devata, Sri Ramchandra. About this vision, the saint has composed a most beautiful and inspiring song, which he sang extempore on the spot.

Limbdi

The next place of halt was Limbdi. Ramdas was, as usual, the guest of Durgashankar Upadhyaya. As on previous occasions, all the devotees of the place came in a stream to Durgashankar's house where it was all bustle and laughter. Ramdas here met the Thakore Saheb of Limbdi and Mother Elizabeth. The Thakore Saheb took Ramdas one day for a drive in his car and showed him the Sannyasi Ashram. Ramdas had Darshan of several Sannyasis and joyfully spent about half an hour with them. Ramdas was specially invited to lunch at Mother Elizabeth's bungalow. Her love for Ramdas was simply wonderful. She would go into ecstasies at the sight of Ramdas, in the same way as a mother would when she meets her long-separated son. Often, she would express her own insignificance compared to Mother Krishnabai in the matter of her love for Ramdas.

D. V. Vyas, an I.C.S. officer, was in Limbdi at the time, being on leave on account of ill-health. The Limbdi friends requested Vyas, who had heard and read of Ramdas, for his car for taking Ramdas from the station to Durgashankar's place. It seems Vyas was keenly anxious to meet Ramdas. So, while lending his car, he stipulated that Ramdas should be brought to his place also once. In response to his wish, Ramdas paid him a visit at his bungalow. He was joyfully greeted by Vyas and his wife. Vyas' health was anything but good. He now got initiated by Ramdas into Ram Mantra. And he asked Ramdas for a token of remembrance. Ramdas gave him a slip of paper on which he wrote the Ram Mantra. Later on, Ramdas also sent him a small photo. Ramdas assured him that by the grace of God he would be all right soon. After this, Ramdas has met him several times in the Ashram and also during his tours. He is now perfectly fit and healthy. All glory to the Divine Name!

A fat old woman, who on previous occasions used to come to see Ramdas at Durgashankar's house, ascending with great difficulty two flights of stairs to reach him, was now lying ill in her house close by. She sent word that Ramdas should go to see her, as she was unable to move out of her bed. So Ramdas went to her rooms. She was simply overwhelmed with joy

on seeing him. She lovingly passed her hands over Ramdas' face and shoulders, all the time muttering something in Gujarati. Ramdas stayed with her for about ten minutes and then left. About this time, Ramdas also heard of the passing away of one of the sugarcandy mothers, Gangamai.

Dr. Shukla, Shantiben and Bhudharbhai came from Wadhwan to spend a night with Ramdas. After the local friends who had come to see Ramdas that evening left, the Wadhwan friends and Ramdas repaired to the topmost storey of the building, where there was a room in which Ramdas used to have his bed. In front of this room there was a small terrace where the four gathered together. Ramdas went on talking to the party narrating his varied experiences both in the Ashram and during the tours, often making them laugh uproariously.

Wadhwan

From Limbdi Ramdas was taken by the friends to Wadhwan. Ramdas stayed with Dr. M. K. Shukla in his newly-built house. All the friends of Wadhwan came here to see him, and the house was full from morning to evening. Here Ramdas met a wellknown aged Kathiawar-saint named Wagh Bapa. Ramdas picked up one thing from his talk in Gujarati to the assembled devotees. He said, "A spoken word has a wonderful potency. It can save or kill, according to its meaning and the way it is uttered. For instance, a word of love and blessing can save a person from suicide, while a word of contempt and insult can drive him to kill." How true!

Rajkot

When travelling from Wadhwan to Rajkot, Ramdas again met in the train Wagh Bapa, who was going to Morvi. At Rajkot, Ramdas stayed with Harilalbhai. As usual, a large number of devotees of the place flocked to the house, where Ramdas lived, and put him questions on various spiritual subjects. Ramdas would give his replies in English, which would be translated into Gujarati. The season being cold, there was always a Dhuni burning before him in the room he occupied. In the evening Jayantilal L. Jobanputra joined the party which

sat round him. Harilalbbhai pressed Ramdas to accept a shawl for covering his body. Ramdas took it hesitatingly, on condition that he should take it back when returned to him.

One day Ramdas was taken to the house of Motilal. His wife and he were leading a most austere life, dedicated to God. Both were wearing Gerua cloth. Motilal gave up the worldly life on the death of his only son. For some time he was in close contact with Sri Aurobindo. He wrote many religious books in Gujarati. Having assumed Sannyas, Motilal J. Mehta now goes by his new name Swami Madhava Tirth. Ramdas cannot forget to mention in this connection the most devoted mother Bhagirathiben, sister of Jayantilal Jobanputra. She is a perfect angel in devotion.

Valasna

From Rajkot Ramdas went to Valasna, invited by Chhelshankar M. Joshi, the Karbari of this State, whom Ramdas had met in Wadhwan during his previous tours. Ramdas stayed with his host for two days. His wife and he were full of devotion. Ramdas also met here the chief of the State. One day, when Ramdas was sitting in the drawing room of the house, he saw a mirror hanging on the wall and a sparrow repeatedly pecking at its own image in it. Observing this, Ramdas fell into a train of thought which was as follows: 'Man, like the sparrow, believes that the reflected picture - that is the world before him - of his own Antaratman is real. He takes his life in the world seriously, gets into the meshes of Maya and becomes miserable. He can be happy only if he realizes that the world is a projection of his own mind and that the Cosmic play is God's Lila'

Abu Road station

From Valasna Ramdas went to Abu Road station to meet Fakirchand Chauhan. Ramdas has, in a previous book, described the blessed couple, Fakirchand and his wife. They were ideal devotees. Ramdas was extremely delighted to be in their midst. We were all swimming in an ocean of love and joy. At this time, Fakirchand was not in the best of health; he had

an attack of a peculiar kind of cough. Fakirchand's condition became day by day more and more serious. His cough became violent. Doctors were called to examine and treat him. He could not rise from his bed and the cough continued day and night. All along, the friend was perfectly resigned and peaceful. Not a word expressing pain or discomfort, passed his lips. His wife who was attending on him with all care and tenderness naturally grew anxious. The time for Ramdas' departure to Karachi having arrived, Ramdas took leave of Fakirchand and his wife. Before doing so, he assured Fakirchand that he would be all right soon.

XII

KARACHI

Ramdas accompanied by Principal Butani and Appibai Trasi who joined him at Abu Road station arrived in Karachi. Here Ramdas stayed with N. B. Butani in the College Bungalow. It was a spacious building, having two storeys and big commodious rooms. Ramdas was lodged in a nice room connected with a big drawing room, where he could meet and talk with visitors who came to see him. Butani's wife, Lakshmi, was all kindness, love and hospitality. Ramdas was like a free, lively and laughing child. During his stay in the house, all the members were vying with one another in providing Ramdas with his necessities. Particular mention may be made of Butani's sister (Tulsi) and his sons who were conspicuous in their service. His meals were, at first, served in another drawing room, presided over by Lakshmi who would see that he got all the things prepared for him. She would now and then press him to eat some one or other of the dishes placed before him. There was a regular flow of visitors who came to see and talk with Ramdas. Philanthropists, professors, Pandits, officers, merchants and students were among them. Jamshed Nusserwanji, aptly called the maker of modern Karachi, came every night, and Ramdas spent some time in his peaceful company. Ramdas found him so simple and unassuming in nature. No wonder that such a noble and kind-hearted man should become the friend of every one in Karachi, as he was rightly considered to be.

Not now!

J. V. Mazumdar, who was the Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax, Sind, invited Ramdas one day to his bungalow. In his drawing room, a few select friends had gathered, among whom was H. K. Kirpalani, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Sind, at that time. He was reputed to be a man of brilliant attainments, having at the same time a great leaning towards spiritual life. There was a serious talk between him and Ramdas, on the crucial question of his own spiritual transformation. He said, "Swamiji, do you believe that when a saint wills, he can change even a rank atheist at once into a highly spiritual being, granting him perfect release from mundane life?" Ramdas replied, "Surely, a saint can do this." At this, he at once said, "I offer myself as one, for such a transformation at your hands. See that you work on me that great miracle this instant." This he uttered as a challenge. Ramdas after hesitating for some time, was about to say that he was going to do it but desisted, and said, "Not now!" He asked why. Ramdas was silent. The friends who were present were puzzled at Ramdas' reply. Why did he say "Not now?" And, why did he remain silent? Only because, it was God's will that the friend should not then get what he wanted. In fact, it is God Himself who is playing the world-game, in which He alone plays all parts, that of the giver and that of the receiver. The usual process can be described as follows:

The soul should march on, steadily, step by step, on the spiritual path till it reaches the goal. Sudden leaps often prove dangerous, for, they not only retard the real progress, but also sometimes block the path. Preparation is essential before that great consummation can be achieved. The body, the mind, and the spirit have all to be thoroughly purified and strengthened before the human system can safely bear the tremendous impact of this supreme realization. If this great change is invited, before the human being is ready to receive, contain and assimilate the divine grace, it is likely that the aspirant's physical system, being unable to stand the strain of it, may be shattered to pieces. Thereafter, that divine instrument will be unable to fulfil the mission for which God intended it. A beautiful simile given to illustrate this great truth is that of an elephant entering a small dilapidated

thatched hut. When it enters the hut, the roofing and the sides of it are sure to give way and collapse completely. God's will is supreme in all matters. There is an illuminating passage in the Upanishads which says, "God reveals Himself in the heart of the person whom He chooses." This is a most significant truth and contains the quintessence of the philosophy of divine transformation.

XIII

SUKKUR - HYDERABAD (SIND)

Ramdas, accompanied by Principal Butani and Appibai arrived at Sukkur and stayed here with Diwan Bahadur Isarsing. He and his wife were very, very devout. She was deeply attached to her mother, whom she looked upon as her Guru. In this connection, Ramdas must say a word about the devotees who are true disciples of their Gurus. A person, who has accepted a saint as a Guru, belongs to a new and illumined fraternity. They are indeed a class by themselves and can be marked out even in a gathering of thousands. There is always light, cheer and peace radiating in their faces. To talk to them of the glory of the Guru means to touch a secret spring in their hearts, from which flows out all their stored up love and devotion. Blessed indeed are those, whose lives come under the redeeming influence of a saint!

When Ramdas and Appibai were alone in the morning, a strange uneasiness seized Ramdas. He felt sleepy, and a mysterious load pressed upon his heart. Ramdas lay himself down for a few minutes, but could not take rest. This state of Ramdas was observed by Appibai and she asked him the cause of it. Ramdas did not reply. After some time, this mood passed away. Later on, we found that this extraordinary experience had a bearing on an event taking place at Abu Road station. At that time, Fakirchand, who was Ramdas' host there, had expired at his house.

One day Ramdas and party went on a visit to Sadh-bela, an island in the river Indus. It was a place frequented by Sadhus.

Here was also a Durbar of Guru Nanak. The party wandered about in the garden attached to the Durbar where it witnessed a most charming sight. A peacock with its plumes spread out, revealing the picturesque multi-coloured designs on them, was seen dancing.

One day a well-known Sufi saint, Dr. Rochaldas of Rohri, came to Sukkur to take Ramdas and party to his place. Crossing the Indus by the barrage, the party saw a cremation ground with the smouldering fire, in which dead bodies had been burnt. The sight was a stern reminder that such is the lot of all beings after death. Whatever the departed soul loved, cherished and toiled for - the accumulated wealth, name and fame - all these have to be left behind. Nothing can be taken to the other world. Here, Ramdas is reminded of the story of a Persian king. He had amassed immense wealth by raiding and looting neighbouring countries. He lived in pomp and luxury. But when he had to obey the call to the other world, he was awakened to the transitory nature of the things around him. He realized that his vaunted wealth, pomp, kingdom and other possessions could not be taken with him. He instantly called his ministers and courtiers and told them that when his bier was carried to the grave, his two hands must be stretched out and left open, so that all the world might see that the Badshah had to go empty-handed, taking nothing with him.

Dr. Rochaldas, our host at Rohri, took us to his Homoeopathic Dispensary. He was a very popular doctor who gave his services free to all who sought his aid. We spent two blissful nights at his place where several friends came to see Ramdas. One day, Dharmadas, a tall fair young man, full of devotion, took Ramdas and party to his house for the afternoon meal. At Larkana which was visited another day, a noteworthy incident took place. Here, Ramdas dictated an article for *The Vision*, wherein he emphasized the love of Gopis for Krishna as the highest form of love. When he dictated it, he felt thrills of raptures. That moment, Ramdas cannot easily forget.

The party left Larkana by a night train and reached Hyderabad (Sind) the next morning. Soon after arrival Ramdas paid

a visit to Sadhu T. L. Vaswani. He was very happy to meet the Sadhu of whom he had heard so much, as a great saint of Sind, wellknown also in other parts of India and abroad. The Sadhu wished for a private interview which was fixed for the night when Ramdas had fifteen minutes private talk with him. He told Ramdas of his intimate spiritual experiences and visions. Ramdas spoke about the universal vision which he considers as the culminating realization of all spiritual endeavour. In fact, Ramdas is certain that when one attains to this beatific vision, one has reached a state which is supremely sublime.

The next day, Ramdas visited the Bal Mandir founded by Sadhu Vaswani and was happy to see the cheerful faces of the children. They jointly sang a prayer in their charming voice. Ramdas also attended the Satsang held in the hall which was full. The mothers sweetly sang songs composed by Sadhu Vaswani. Then, in his gentle voice, the Sadhu, who presided over the function, spoke on self-surrender. Ramdas also spoke for a few minutes at the Satsang. The same day, Ramdas went also to St. Mira's Girls' High School, conducted by the Sadhu. It was an ideal educational institution for girls. After the creation of Pakistan, the school has been shifted to Poona where Sadhu Vaswani is at present carrying on his noble mission. From Hyderabad (Sind) the party returned to Karachi.

XIV

ON THE TRAIN - AGRA

After Karachi, the next scene opens in Agra. But before coming to it, Ramdas must relate some of his experiences in the train that took him to Agra, from Marwar Junction. He got into a compartment occupied by a prominent pleader of Hyderabad (Sind) and his wife. Ramdas had with him a small bag, hanging from his shoulder, underneath the only cloth that covered his body. Ramdas skipped into the compartment, and took his seat on a vacant berth. The couple occupying the other seats had with them a lot of luggage - trunks, hand-bags, holds-all, tiffin-baskets, water-jugs and what not. The train started. Ramdas feeling perfectly happy, was freely dangling his legs and sometimes stamping the floor in glee. This

was noticed by the pleader and his wife. The latter remarked, "Look at him! How free and cheerful he is! He does not possess anything. Look at our own luggage! How much it is! And what are we doing? Worrying over it, watching night and day to see that it is safe. Where is freedom and peace for us? We are caught up in these possessions. I for one cannot but envy him, whoever he is." And again she cast a meaningful glance at Ramdas. The husband smiled and expressed his complete agreement with what she said. After this Ramdas lay down, resting his head on his arm, and fell asleep, to wake up after a few minutes. The couple was very kind to Ramdas and gave him a cup of ovaltine to drink.

At Agra, Ramdas was the guest of Gulab Rai. His revered father Bhavani Prasad was also there to welcome Ramdas. Gulab Rai's son, Ram Shankar, was Ramdas' constant companion. This young man used to take him out for long walks in the evening. Ramdas had an invitation one day from the proprietor of a printing press, known as Sahitya Press. It was arranged to get the Hindi translation of Ramdas' Gita-Sandesh already done by Gulab Rai, printed at this Press. A postcard came here from Abu Road station about this time to inform Ramdas that Fakirchand had expired. So, what Ramdas had felt at Sukkur that morning was the effect of what was happening then at Abu Road. God's will be done! A great devotee had left this earth, to be eternally at the feet of the Most High. But his wife and many friends were, indeed, poorer for his departure. Ramdas was also one of these.

When Ramdas blesses a person who is seriously ill, and says that he will be all right, it means that the person will get the highest benediction from such a blessing, which is decidedly more of spiritual nature than material. Ramdas' mission in life is to see to the spiritual uplift of all beings who come in touch with him. Losses, sufferings and trials, and even death on the physical plane, are things that pertain to the perishable part of a human being. But it is his spiritual welfare that is rightly of the utmost concern to saints. And this friend, Fakirchand, was assured of this.

Ramdas must here make a brief mention of Bhavani Prasad

whom readers of the book, 'In the Vision of God', know. Bhavani Prasad was now found residing in a cool underground room in his son's house. He was deeply engaged in devotional practices. Ramdas often used to be with him in this subterranean retreat.

XV

LUCKNOW

From Agra Ramdas went to Lucknow. Here, a very humorous incident took place. It was the first time Ramdas was visiting that city. He went there at the invitation of Shanti Prakashji, President of the Swami Rama Tirtha Publication League. This League was started by the disciples and admirers of Swami Rama Tirtha, under the inspiration of Sri Narayana Swami, the chief disciple of Swami Rama Tirtha. Ramdas had intimated to Shanti Prakashji in advance about his coming to Lucknow on a particular date, so that he, or some one on his behalf, could receive Ramdas at the station. The train reached the station; Ramdas got down and waited to meet the friend. But there was no sign of him. An old man with a coarse unkempt beard, was seen running three or four times along the side of the train, peeping into every compartment. Ramdas watched him with some curiosity, thinking it was somebody come to receive another. Soon he vanished and Ramdas, left alone on the platform, came out and made enquiries about the Rama Tirtha Publication League. Failing to get the information from the Railway servants and a policeman, Ramdas went straight to the tonga stand and asked an old tonga driver who undertook to take him to a place where he would be able to get the information. Ramdas jumped into the tonga which was now driven by the old man along several roads, streets and narrow winding lanes, halting every now and then before some big imposing buildings to make enquiries. After this driving about for over an hour Ramdas was at last taken to a dark lane. The tonga finally halted in front of a building which bore the name of the League lit up by a light. Ramdas paid the old tonga driver all that he could find in his small bag and

entered the house. Inside it there was inky darkness wherever he turned, except for a small glow of light in a room. Ramdas went there and peeped in through the window. He saw a fat, well-built man sitting down for his night meal. On enquiry this person directed Ramdas to the right door. On knocking at it, a young man appeared and asked, "Who are you?" On being told of the identity, he exclaimed: "Ha, my uncle has gone to the station to receive you. Did you not meet him?" Ramdas replied in the negative. The young man took Ramdas inside and seated him on a carpet. After Ramdas had washed his hands and feet, he was asked to eat some fruits and drink milk. By this time, it was nearly 11 P.M. Ramdas now waited for Shanti Prakashji. It was nearing midnight, when the friend turned up. Whom did Ramdas meet? The same man with grey hair and grizzly unkempt beard who was running along the platform. That was Shanti Prakashji! As soon as Ramdas saw him, he rushed towards him, and in the twinkling of an eye, we were locked in each other's embrace, executing a dance the like of which could rarely be seen or imagined. Our joy knew no bounds. We laughed and laughed. Ramdas stayed here for about a week, meeting visitors, and then left for Jhansi

XVI

JHANSI

From Lucknow Ramdas went to Jhansi. At the Jhansi station, Ramdas was received by Triveni Prasad and about two dozen other devotees. Ramdas was the guest of Triveni Prasad. He was invited also to the houses of several devotees, whom he had met on previous occasions.

Particular mention must be made of his visit to the house of Janaki Sharan, son of the late Mahadev Prasad. Mahadev Prasad, as Ramdas has described him in an earlier book, was a great devotee and lover of saints. He spent all his wealth in their service, ultimately becoming a pauper. This time, Ramdas missed him very much. Janaki Sharan was living in a small house, at the end of a narrow lane, branching off from a main road. The place was dark and insanitary. He had only two

rooms to occupy - the small one for his kitchen and the other for living - with a narrow verandah. At one time, when the family was wealthy, Janaki Sharan lived with his father in his own bungalow. The present pathetic spectacle of the poverty-stricken son and his family touched Ramdas' heart. A child had been born to Janaki Sharan. Ramdas took the baby, a boy, from the mother and fondled him. Then Ramdas told them, "This is Mahadev Prasad, born again as your son!" At this, Janaki Sharan's eyes were filled with tears of joy; he must have felt inwardly blessed. The scene is still vivid before Ramdas' mental vision. They gave Ramdas some sweets to eat. He left, invoking the choicest blessings and grace of the Almighty on this spiritually rich, though materially poor, family.

Money-lender is He and debtor is He

A stream of visitors would flow into Triveni Prasad's house, throughout the day and part of the night, except when Ramdas was out. Some visitors would express their surprise at Ramdas' association with Triveni Prasad. They would even tell him to his face, "How could you catch such saints in your cage, you, who are the whole day calculating the interest you have to collect from your debtors." Without being moved in the least, our friend would return only a genial smile. After his retirement from Government service, Triveni Prasad had been engaged in money-lending business. But, whenever he had to serve saints, he was extremely liberal and lavish in his hospitality. He would, if required, sacrifice his very life for them. Such was his love and devotion! God's play is indeed inscrutable. It is He who is the money-lender, it is He also who is the debtor!

Prayer for unconditional Grace

Among the devotees, coming to see Ramdas at Triveni Prasad's house, there were some who could sweetly sing the songs of U.P. saints like Tulsidas, Surdas, Kabir, Benarasi and others. Ramdas remembers particularly one song sung by a devotee, the purport of which was as follows:

"Oh, Lord, You are known for Your grace, forgiveness and mercy. But, what do You do? You say, 'Take my name continuously, observe all kinds of vows, pass through severe aus-

terities, undergo strict disciplines for the control of the mind and the senses. When you have done this, I will grant you my Darshan! Here, You are revealing Yourself as You are not a gracious mother, but a hard taskmaster. It is something like this . a rich man engages a labourer to do some hard work for him. After the work is over, at the close of the day, he pays him the day's wages. The labourer, of course, does not think that the wage that he gets is a generous gift from his employer. For, he had earned it by the sweat of his brow. So, if You grant Darshan after we have gone through all the spiritual practices prescribed by You, we are having it, not as an act of Your grace but as our dues. Since You are, as saints declare, all grace, compassion and goodness, I pray to You to unconditionally give me Your Darshan which I pine for. But, mind You, I won't do anything for it. If You respond to this appeal of mine, then only can I believe that You are really gracious. Otherwise, how can I have any faith in the words of saints when they describe You as such?"

This time, also, Ramdas had the great joy of meeting our old Pandaji. As soon as he heard of Ramdas' arrival, he ran up to Triveni Prasad's house. We were happy to see each other after several years. He invited Ramdas for a meal at his place. Sweet memories of the past crowded into Ramdas' mind.

One day, a Vakil invited Ramdas to his house for meals. He and his son were at loggerheads with each other. But both father and son lovingly attended on Ramdas. Till then they were not even on speaking terms with each other. But they joined together in the service of Ramdas. This made them forget their quarrel and the two became reconciled. They recovered their lost affection for each other. Ramdas experienced a peculiar joy whenever he saw these two together, smiling and talking lovingly. It was a regular feast for Ramdas' eyes.

A devotee's fast for Darshan

Karta Krishna's daughter, Gyan Devi, was married to a young man, who had neither love nor regard for saints. Karta Krishna and his children were however deeply attached to Ramdas. Ramdas had been invited often by Karta Krishna to his

house and had fondled and played with the children. During this visit, Gyan Devi keenly desiring to see Ramdas, proposed to her husband that he should take her to him. But the husband did not like the idea and refused to do so. At this, Gyan Devi went on a fast and would take neither food nor drink unless she saw Ramdas. By the evening of that day, Gyan Devi's father-in-law hastened to Ramdas and requested him to attend the Bhajan that he had arranged at his place. On Ramdas' arrival at the house, Gyan Devi came to him and fell at his feet, weeping. Then, Ramdas was told by her father-in-law about her fast and how, as a result of it, they had to arrange the Bhajan and invite Ramdas for it. Ramdas then called for food and pressed Gyan Devi to break her fast in his presence, which she did.

Four types of Mukti

Ramdas spoke about four types of Mukti, viz., Sayujya, Samipya, Salokya and Sarupya. Sayujya Mukti is complete absorption of the individual soul into the Cosmic Spirit, as in the Buddhistic Nirvana which is beautifully expressed in the "Light of Asia" thus: "The dew-drop slips into the shining sea." Shankaracharya defines Sayujya Mukti as an Advaitic realization which is experienced when the illumined soul shakes off its sense of individuality - in other words - when the soul awakes from its sleep of ignorance and knows that it is the only One eternal, infinite truth and existence, than whom there is none other. Here, God, soul and the world disappear into One transcendent reality.

In Samipya Mukti, the devotee enjoys the Lord's company. It is like being in the Heaven of the Christians and the Vaikuntha of the Vaishnavas. Here, the separateness between God and soul is maintained. The devotee enjoys the nearness of God. His one purpose in life is to serve Him and His devotees. He takes delight in speaking and singing of Him. Salokya Mukti is a state of salvation, in which the devotee chooses to remain in the same realm in which God lives. He does not seek to be near Him. For, he feels His presence in himself and everywhere about him. In fact, through his inner experience, he knows that God and he are not different. But still he likes to remain separate from Him, in order to enjoy the bliss of sweet

communion with Him. As examples of Salokya Mukti, we have Jesus, Ramakrishna, Kabir, Jnandev and many other saints of India and other countries.

In Sarupya Mukti, by continuous contemplation of God, the devotee is gradually transformed into His very likeness. Therefore it is said that the messengers of Vishnu look like Vishnu Himself. When your love for any person is intense, you are bound to become like him, not only in your inner nature but also in your external form. There is the instance of St. Francis of Assisi. By constantly praying to Christ and always tuning his mind with the divine personality of Christ, not only did he develop the divine qualities of Christ, but his body also underwent some changes - it was impressed with stigmata, the marks similar to the wounds on the crucified body of Christ.

From Jhansi, Ramdas went on a short visit to Roni and Trikamgarh. At Roni, Ramdas ascended a hill to visit a temple on the top of it. Shambhu Dayal came down about half a mile from Trikamgarh to welcome Ramdas and take him to his place in procession. Ramdas was forcibly lifted and placed on a horse, richly caparisoned with lace and silk cloth. After a short stay, Ramdas returned to Jhansi. At Jhansi, Ramdas received an invitation from Swami Sivanand Saraswati to attend the Kumbha Mela at Haridwar. But friends dissuaded him from doing so, on account of the cholera prevailing there, at the time. Ramdas met here his friends Vishnuswarup, Lakhpathrai, H. N. Bhargava, Bala Prasad, Chhedilal and others.

At Jhansi, Ramdas also met Swami Ramanand, the Sannyasi of Chitrakut, who, hearing of Ramdas' visit came to Jhansi from a place nearby. But he arrived in the afternoon of the day on the evening of which Ramdas was to leave for New Delhi. So, he could spend only about two hours in the blissful company of the Swami. They met at a retreat built and looked after by Triveni Prasad for the use of itinerant Sannyasis and Sadhus. It was a most joyful meeting. Ramdas had not had the opportunity to have Darshan of the Swami after Ramdas escaped from Pilikoti Ashram at Chitrakut. Swami Ramanand, it will be remembered kept watch on Ramdas, lest he should leave the Ashram. The incident is described in the book "In the Vision of God."

XVII

NEW DELHI - SIMLA

In New Delhi, Ramdas was the guest of Shambhunath Kakar. His mother was overflowing with devotion. Ramdas spent a few delightful days at Shambhunath's bungalow. Here Ramdas met a new friend, Mahant Amba Dutt Giri, who invited him to his quarters.

A pathetic sight

Another friend, Bhatnagar, took Ramdas to Old Delhi, on a visit to a very poor family. The sight Ramdas saw there was most pathetic. The mother - her name was Bhogendravati - and five children were living in a tiny room. The mother had lost her husband, who had been her sole support. She and the children were now left destitute. They welcomed Ramdas with great love. When Ramdas entered the room, the mother and children became happy, almost bubbling with joy. It was a rare experience, when the youngest child came to Ramdas, with his hand-bag containing a slate and a pencil, to show him the alphabet it had scribbled. The child freely got on Ramdas' lap and sat on it. Ramdas closed his arms around it and fondled it. From a distance, the mother was watching the scene with moist eyes. Ramdas gave her the Ram Mantra and assured her that God would protect her and her children. She said, "I truly believe from this moment, the dark shadow that has been hanging over me and my children has cleared off. God has taken us into His arms. This is a grand day for us."

Ramdas could see that they felt a wrench at heart when he parted from them. Later on, Ramdas was very happy to know that by God's grace, a philanthropic friend had arranged for the education and boarding of this mother's children and also procured for her an employment by which she could earn her livelihood. This is how God protects those who are committed to His care.

A mother's grief

A word here about Shambhunath's mother. She had now lost her husband and her only daughter. The sorrow over these

departed ones had made her life desolate and bitter. At the sight of Ramdas, she heaved a sigh of relief and prayed to him to stay at their house as long as he could. The nature and intensity of her grief at the loss of her child can be realized only by a mother. Others cannot imagine it. Ramdas has met many a mother stricken with such grief. His heart melts and goes out to them. Ramdas spoke a few words of solace to soothe the lacerated heart of Shambhunath's mother, and before Ramdas left her house, he found her relieved.

Universal Brotherhood Gathering

R. Raman, the editor of the Children's News, came one morning to request Ramdas to take an active part in the meeting of the Universal Brotherhood that was to be held that day at New Delhi. Ramdas told him that he could not deliver a speech but that he would attend the meeting. The friend then pressed Ramdas to write a message to be read out at the meeting. Ramdas then prepared a short address (given below). R. Raman Shambhunath and Ramdas went to the meeting. In a large hall, Ramdas saw on a platform about two dozen prominent men and women of the day, including some European ladies. Ramdas took his seat in the front row among the audience. A wellknown Congress leader presided over the meeting. The proceedings started. Ramdas was a silent spectator of the whole show which, after all, proved to be a poor one. The speeches were flat and uninspiring. The proceedings were so artificial, formal and dull that the audience were feeling sleepy and indifferent. After the speeches, the Secretary of the Society who was responsible for the meeting, read out the written messages sent by various friends, in a low and droning voice, hardly audible to the persons even near the platform - Ramdas' message being one of them. Ramdas felt a great relief when the function came to a close, and he slipped out quietly and got into the car waiting for him.

Ramdas' Message

Ramdas' message ran as follows:

Beloved friends, the message Ramdas has for you is simple. Love one another, for the great Spirit that dwells in you all,

is the same. Recognize the truth that you are all sons and daughters of one Divine Parent. The differences of caste, creed, colour and race are man-made. These have no place in your lives, when the alchemy of Love has transmuted and welded you all into one. The human quest is for peace and freedom. Love is the fulfilment of this quest. You have assembled here, coming from various countries of the world, to renew the ties of friendship. Don't think that you are linked to one another by mere intellectual affinity - feel that the Light of the Eternal, which is there in every one of you, has brought you together. Base all your actions in relation to your fellowmen, on the knowledge of the Eternal. Then you will attain real peace and freedom. The world is full of strife. You can bring harmony and peace into it, by living in awareness of the Universal Truth. You cannot approach this Truth by exploiting others, but only by giving yourself away for them. A life attuned to sacrifice and service is the test of your friendliness to them. The candle burns itself away, and takes delight in giving light to all. So, also, life finds its own joy when out of pure love and kindness, it flows out to give peace and happiness to others. So, let love be the keynote of your lives, service its expression, and joy and eternal freedom your exalted experience!

To Simla

Mahant Amba Dutt Giri invited Ramdas to Simla, and offered to take him to the place. Ramdas agreed to go. Even during the journey to this hill station, Ramdas had some new experiences. Upto Kalka junction, the railway carriages were of the usual size. After Kalka junction, they were considerably smaller, and the railroad tortuous. In the small carriages, we looked like sitting in a toy train. As we ascended the hills, the temperature was gradually falling, and the cold increasing. The scenery on either side of the road was simply bewitching.

1 On reaching Simla, Amba Dutt Giri took Ramdas to his house, attached to a Shiva temple. Here, Ramdas was cordially welcomed by Amba Dutt Giri's wife, daughter and son-in-law. The chill winds, to which Ramdas had been exposed during this journey, gave him a bad cold. The next day, Pandit S. N. Sharma of Satsang Sabha met Ramdas. He proposed that Ram-

das should deliver discourses at the Satsang Sabha, every evening. Ramdas agreed and, in spite of his indisposition, punctually arrived every evening and spoke to friends there for about an hour. These discourses, four in number, are together summarized below.

Need for Humility and Surrender

One fundamental point that you have to bear in mind, while repeating Ram Nam, is that when you take the Name you must feel that it is only by His will and power that you are doing so, and not by your own. If at the very start of your Sadhana, you feel that you are doing everything by the Divine will and power, your progress will be easy. There are some people who do Japa and are very proud of the fact that they are doing it. They think they are superior to others. That is very harmful. Spiritual aspirants have to remove egoism from their nature. We defeat our object by developing a feeling that we are purer than others.

The first thing for a Sadhaka is to get rid of his pride. Once a certain scholar was very proud of his learning; he used to go about holding discussions with learned Pandits, vanquish them and advertise his triumphs over them. One day, he met a saint, simple and childlike, not at all learned but full of devotion for God, ever smiling and ever in tune with his Supreme Beloved. As soon as he saw the light and joy on the face of the saint, the scholar surrendered himself at the latter's feet and became free from pride. He started uttering the Name. The saint's touch and initiation gave him a passion for the Name and he was constantly repeating "Hari Bol — Hari Bol". He now began to feel that he was humbler than the dust, and whenever he met any one of those whom he had vanquished before in a discussion, he would prostrate before him, even if it be in a public street. The transformation effected by the saint was remarkable indeed.

Merit of a Mendicant's life

If you want to enter the realm of spirituality, you must lay aside all your low desires, your selfish motives, your sense of

possession. For this you must have profound humility - humility at the very core of your heart. In order to cultivate such humility, the great spiritual teachers like Buddha, Mahavir, Shankaracharya, and Saint Francis of Assisi have enjoined upon their followers to take to the mendicant's life, to subsist on alms. When a mendicant approaches a householder for food with a beggar's bowl, his pride is gradually eliminated. This is essential for spiritual progress and rapid approach to God. The aspirant must feel that he has totally dedicated himself, as he is, to God, his Supreme Ideal. The Bhikkus of Buddhism, the Bhikkus of Jainism, the Sannyasins of Hinduism and friars of the Franciscan Order all belong to the fraternity of monks who live on alms. The object of adopting this life of a true mendicant is two-fold, namely, the complete disappearance of the ego-sense and the development of the spirit of entire reliance on God. Ramdas has realized the greatness and the value of this life from his own experiences. When he was a Sannyasi, moving from place to place, he felt as free as air. At every step, he learnt to look up to God for all his needs, material and spiritual. At last, he got an inner assurance from the Divine that he was an accepted child of God and thereafter, all anxiety, either for the maintenance of his body or for his spiritual welfare, totally left him. The freedom that he then enjoyed was simply ineffable.

Only when you surrender all that you have to the Divine, does the Divine fill you with supreme joy and infinite bliss. It is rightly said that virtues can dwell only in that heart which is truly humble. A proud man can have no purity, love, compassion or fellow-feeling. And, where these are lacking, there can be no peace and joy.

Hanuman's example

Hanuman had to face a demoness when he was going to Lanka. The demoness obstructed his way. She had the power to magnify herself and become as big as she chose to be. So, she used this power, became as big as a mountain and stood before Hanuman. Hanuman also knew the trick. So he became bigger than the demoness, but the demoness grew still bigger and there was no passage left for Hanuman to go ahead.

What was he to do, then? He suddenly reduced his size, became a fly and quietly passed by the demoness. If you want to enter the realm of the Immortal, become small as a fly. When you go for a bath to the sea, you find big waves dashing against the shore. You cannot stand abreast the waves - the waves would simply dash you down. You therefore bend down and allow them to pass over you, leaving you perfectly safe. There is another illustration, that of the small blade of grass and the big tree. During a storm, the former bends itself and is safe, while the latter - the bigger the tree the worse for it - is uprooted and dashed to pieces.

Similarly if you want to realize God, then you must free yourself from Abhiman, from egoism. When we continuously think of the attributes of the Almighty - His wisdom, His purity, His peace, His love - we must feel we are too small before Him - like a glow-worm before the sun, too insignificant to be made much of. As darkness disappears before light, the ego-sense too disappears before the thought of God's greatness and glory. Like a drop mingling with the ocean, and becoming the ocean itself, by attaining God, we mingle with the Universal Self and realize that we are one with It, with the Infinite Love. This realization you can have by ceaseless remembrance of God.

For that, you must, first, set apart some time, exclusively, for the repetition of His Name. And, in the beginning, it would be better to do the repetition loudly. But later on, it must be done only mentally, and when the mind has begun to recite the Name automatically, you will find that you have gained a distinct power - the power to keep your mind under perfect control. For gaining peace and happiness, the activities of the mind must be controlled. The strength to do this comes only through the repetition of the Divine Name. You must not let yourself become the slave of the mind. Be its master by becoming the servant of the Infinite Power within yourself. Conquest of the mind is harder to achieve than the conquest of the world. Let us become the slaves of God, instead of being slaves of the mind. Then, not only do we get happiness, peace and joy, but we also become Himself.

Self-dedication or self-surrender is the last stage. You cannot achieve it at one stroke. You have to bring it about

gradually. First, devote some definite period of time to the exclusive thought of God. Chant His name. Sing of Him. Meditate on His greatness. Talk to Him - as you would to your mother - placing all your doubts and difficulties, weaknesses and impurities before Him and He will wash you clean. Let the talk, the prayer and the appeals be all sincere and whole-hearted!

The case of Kabir and Janabai

If you regularly practise this Sadhana, then even when you are, afterwards, engaged in any other work, your mind will be reverting to Him, every now and then, till, at last, it becomes continually occupied by Him, and you feel, that all your work is being done for Him and by Him. Kabir was a weaver, and even after his realization of God, he continued in the weaving profession - he did not have to give up weaving. He knew and said that the cloth was woven, not by himself, but by Ram. A Maharashtra lady devotee, Janabai by name, was always occupied with the repetition of the Name "Vithal". And she too, like Kabir, used to be engaged in work all day long. When she was grinding corn, she believed it was her "Vithal" who was doing the work. This is real dedication. You thus see that actions need not be renounced - they only need be done with this consciousness that God is the doer. Then they would all become divine. Arjun was told, in the Gita, "You need not give up action, but make your actions divine by dedicating them to God. Be a divine worker, realizing that you are not the doer, but that the doer is He, who is the immanent power."

A positive path

This is a positive path. Some persons struggle to first eradicate evil desire from the mind, in order that they may thereby become fit for God-realization. That is not the way. From the very beginning, you must fill yourself with the thought of God entirely, so that the impurities of the lower nature may be automatically washed away by the power of that thought. You cannot have the thought of God and the world at the same time, as you cannot have both light and darkness at one place simultaneously. Bring in light and the darkness will depart.

Bring in God and the ego-sense will automatically disappear. The important attribute of God, that you have to fill your mind with, is that He is all-pervading. You then become all-pervading yourself not merely an individual cut off from the rest of life, but as one with all life itself.

Take the wellknown instance of Mahatma Gandhi, who was in jail. There were also others in the jail at the same time, but they were criminals. Mahatma Gandhi was always cheerful whereas the criminals were feeling miserable. It is not the environment that is responsible for our misery, but the condition of our own mind. Happiness and misery depend entirely on our own inner state. If we are in tune with the Almighty, whatever happens, we remain perfectly happy. The devotee says, "Even in hell, O God! I can be happy, by thinking of You, by converting it into a heaven with a drop of joy infinite that You have filled my heart with." Mind can make a hell of heaven and a heaven of hell, it is said. We are the makers of our hell and heaven. We ought to take everything that happens to us as being done for our best. For, everything is determined by the Almighty, who is all-love; all-wisdom and all-mercy.

XVIII

MEERUT - AMRITSAR

From Simla Ramdas was invited to Meerut by Jai Shankar, the Honorary Secretary of Harinam Sankirtan Mandal. Ramdas was first taken to the office of "Sankirtan", a Hindi religious monthly, the editor of which was Durga Prasad, a friend of Jai Shankar. It was 3 P.M., so Durga Prasad asked him what he would take for the evening meal. Ramdas said he would have only ovaltine. When the friend heard the word, "Ovaltine", he was greatly disturbed. He opened his eyes wide and looked intently at Ramdas. Ramdas noticed this and kept quiet. Durga Prasad, a Hindu of the most orthodox type, had to make the best of a bad bargain. He introduced Ramdas to a vakil who was agreeable to have Ramdas on any terms, orthodox or otherwise. A Bhajan was held that evening in a Shiva temple. The vakil friend took Ramdas to his house after the

Bhajan. Ramdas enjoyed his stay with him very much. The next day, the friends notified, by handbills, that Ramdas would be available for interview at the Sanatan Dharma Rakshini Sabha, both in the mornings and evenings. Various religious problems were discussed at these meetings. Most of the visitors were orthodox in their belief. Ramdas tried to steer clear of controversial topics. But even his emphasis on the principle of universal religion, giving only a secondary place to rituals and ceremonies, displeased some friends. But he could not help it. True faith is as free as air, and that alone can take the soul direct to God.

Bhai Vir Singh

Ramdas had been longing to meet Bhai Vir Singh. That was one of the reasons for including Amritsar as one of the places in his Punjab tour programme. It was a pure joy to meet this saint. His hair had gone grey, his face shone with a subdued spiritual lustre. Ramdas stayed with him for five days. He was extremely kind to Ramdas. Ramdas was provided with small, well-furnished quarters. Very few came to meet him there, except Bhai Vir Singh and his wife, Col. Sharma and his wife and Ramchandra C. Gupta from Lahore. Ramdas should not omit to mention here his contact with Dr. Balbir Singh, brother of Bhai Vir Singh. Balbir Singh was a man with high academical qualifications. It was he who looked after Ramdas and attended to his wants. Ramdas used to spend afternoons, and sometimes mornings too, on a circular platform in the middle of the garden. The place was calm and peaceful. Col. Sharma and his wife came to invite Ramdas to Nainital. Sharma was an I.M.S. officer in the Army, in Abbotabad, where, it appears, he came across a copy of *The Vision*. On enquiry, he got Ramdas' address at Amritsar and came there to meet him. Ramdas agreed to go to Nainital on his return from Kashmir.

The Golden Temple

At the suggestion of Balbir Singh, Ramdas visited a Satyanarayan Temple, built on the model of the Golden Temple.

Rāmdas also paid a visit to the glorious Golden Temple and had Darshan of the huge well-decorated Granth Sahib. The temple is not only a marvel in its beautiful setting in the midst of the most entrancing environments, but it also elevates the hearts of all who enter it or walk round the tank. You feel you are on hallowed ground, sanctified by the tread, the touch and the presence of quite a galaxy of saintly souls who once lived there, and of devotees who visited it from time to time.

XIX

LAHORE - RAWALPINDI

From Amritsar Ramdas went to Lahore for the sake of the friend, Ramchandra C. Gupta. Here new contacts were made. Lady Motisagar, who had sisterly feelings for Gupta, came to see him at the latter's quarters. She invited Ramdas for a meal at her bungalow. Lady Motisagar was full of devotion. But she was leading an unhappy life in spite of her vast wealth. She told Ramdas of her sorrows in heart-rending words. Ramdas advised her to take complete refuge in God. But she said, her mind was so deeply caught in the meshes of Maya, that she found it hard to turn it to God. Ramdas gave her the Ram Mantra. Thereafter she used to come to Ramchandra Gupta's house every day. She said she felt great peace of mind whenever she was in Ramdas' company.

Another day, Ramchandra Gupta took Ramdas to meet Ramchand Manchanda, a prominent advocate of Lahore. On the lawn, in front of the house, there were some chairs round a table. Gupta led Ramdas to one of these chairs and asked him to occupy it. Then he went inside the bungalow to fetch the advocate. It seemed that this friend was not very keen on seeing Ramdas. So some persuasion was found necessary to make him agree to meet Ramdas. When, after all, he came, he sat beside Ramdas and observed: "Sadhus and Sannyasis have no other business than to go and see rich people, seeking monetary help. I do not like this." While saying this, he cast a significant look at Ramdas, indicating that Ramdas belonged to this set of Sadhus. Ramchandra Gupta was naturally pained

to hear this. But Ramdas was cool, and calm. He side-tracked the talk by discoursing on the power of Divine Love, concluding with the words "The highest attainment in human life is the realization of God." After a few minutes, it appeared as though a veil had been removed from the mind of our advocate friend. He suddenly became friendly and hospitable. This change brought light and cheer to the heart of Ramchandra Gupta. Thereafter, both the advocate and his wife became deeply attached to Ramdas. Another day, they invited Ramdas for Bhiksha.

While at Lahore, Ramdas went to see the new Sikh National College. The buildings were still under construction. But some classes had been opened. Principal Ranjit Singh was a broad-minded person. He took Ramdas round the classes. Ramdas felt very happy to have visited the college and particularly to have met such a good soul. He was a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi.

Here, Ramdas suddenly thought of sending a wire to Butani, who was then in Anandashram, asking him to come immediately for discussing some important matters. Butani started at once, and although travelling third class at a stretch without breaking his journey anywhere on the way, arrived at Lahore as fresh as ever. He spent a night with us, and the next day, at Ramdas' suggestion, proceeded to Amritsar to have Darshan of Bhai Vir Singh. He had also the chance of seeing Dharam Devi and the same night he left for Bangalore.

Dharam Devi

Dharam Devi was a remarkable girl that Ramdas came across during his visit to Lahore. She was intoxicated with Divine Love. Her shining face suffused with smiles of ecstasy and the spontaneous flow of words, full of wisdom, from her lips, bore witness to a rare manifestation of the Divine Spirit in one so young and inexperienced. Ramdas felt immensely happy in her blessed company on three occasions. Her talks were so fresh, brilliant and elevating. Ramdas first met Sri Dharam Devi in R. C. Gupta's house at Lahore where she was specially brought so that Ramdas might see her. He met her again in the

same city at another friend's. For the third time, Ramdas saw the girl at the bungalow of Justice M. V. Bhide.

Sri Dharam Devi is small in stature and build, for her age. There is an abandon and playfulness in her movements. She is totally free from shyness. Her face is always glowing with a strange lustre. Her eyes are generally almost closed and have a contemplative look. When she emphasizes a point by appropriate gestures, she keeps her eyes open for the time, and we see in them an unusual brilliance and tenderness. Replies to questions put to her come spontaneously out of her lips with delightful charm. You are dazzled by her words, they are so full of wit and wisdom! And she speaks with great confidence and authority. She is simple in her ways and humble in spirit. She displays a love for the society of saints. She is obviously inebriated with love for Krishna.

When Ramdas saw her at R. C. Gupta's house, this girl was in the mood of Radha - with half-closed eyes, filled with deep love for Krishna. She was moving her hands alternately backwards and forwards imagining she was churning curds. The butter to be gathered was of course intended for Krishna. She would be talking all the time about Krishna. She would taunt Him for hiding Himself and giving her the pain of separation. Suddenly, she would stop her movements and go into a blissful trance and sit still. Again, she would begin talking to Krishna, beckoning Him with both her hands to come to her. All this was done with a real feeling - it was not play-acting. When she thought of Krishna, she would completely identify herself with Radha in her feelings, emotions and every part of her body. People who saw her in these ecstatic states used to gaze at her with wonder and joy.

When Ramdas met her for the last time, one of the friends in our group requested her to initiate him into the method of meditation. She took him to an adjoining vacant room. Soon after, we heard a sweet enthralling strain, coming from the room. The girl was reciting "Radhe Shyam" in a high measured tone. As the friend had some other pressing engagement, the instruction had to be stopped in a short time. But, he said that he had been greatly impressed.

Another sight that cast a spell on Ramdas was this. Dharam Devi was asked to call Krishna in her favourite manner of repeating "My Lord" or "Mere Prabhu!" She warned us that she could not call Him thrice for, she said, if she did so, she would go into a trance for several hours, but that she would call Him only twice. We agreed. With a charming smile, eyes nearly closed, and face uplifted, the words, "Mere Prabhu" issued from her beautiful lips twice, with all the sweetness and rapture of Love. We were thrilled.

A few of the questions put to Dharam Devi by visitors with her replies are given below:-

Q: What is to be done for realizing God?

A: Seek the society of saints and do Kirtan.

Q: How to know a saint?

A: By the light he radiates and the deep impression he makes on you by his words.

Q: What is the Sadhana for getting Darshan of Krishna?

A: Love is the way. Lay your intellect at His feet and love Him with all your heart and you will realize Him.

Q: Which is the best kind of Yoga?

A: I find whole-hearted Prem for Krishna is the best way.

From Lahore, Ramdas came to Rawalpindi. Here, he occupied the room on the first floor of Gurudas Jaggi's house, specially prepared for him. In the morning he used to come down and meet friends in a room on the ground-floor. Among the visitors who came to see him, he must particularly say a few words about our friend, P. B. Chandwani. He came with his old father. Ramdas was glad to meet them both. One thing that Ramdas noticed in Chandwani was, that he was all love and Seva for his father. He would bring him his shoes, and tie laces himself. His filial love reminded Ramdas of a Gujarati friend, Nandalal, who had come to the Ashram a few years ago, with his old mother. This friend was also doing service to his mother with great care and attention. Really, blessed are the sons who find joy in serving their aged parents. In fact, this joy is pure and glorious.

One day, Ramdas was invited to Chandwani's house for evening refreshments. Chandwani has a philanthropic bent of mind. But he would give money only to organized charitable institutions, such as orphanages, widows' homes, schools, etc. He did not believe in giving alms to stray beggars. Over this question, Ramdas saw him crossing swords with his father, who was in favour of giving alms to any one in need, whom one meets in the street or at one's door. Chandwani tried to convince his father to the contrary, by argument. But the latter would not agree. The discussion went on, in the best of spirits. This difference of views did not come in the way of the wholehearted devotion and service Chandwani freely offered to his beloved father.

Pandit Jivandas was another friend whose house Ramdas used to visit at Rawalpindi. He was madly in love with Ramdas. He would take Ramdas to the water-tap in the mornings and besmearing his head, face and body with curds, give him a refreshing cold bath. This went on every day, during Ramdas' stay at Rawalpindi. His son, Ramswaroop, who is now no more, was a young man, but completely unworldly, with the innocence and guilelessness of childhood.

Having heard of the arrival of Ramdas, Swami Anand Swaroop who was at the time living in a kuti outside the town, came to see him. Ramdas was also taken to his kuti. Ramdas noticed a deep depression on the Swami's head and asked about it. He was told it was due to the heavy blow inflicted on him by a thief who had entered the kuti in the dead of night to rob him of the money which he was supposed to possess. The poor Swami had to remain in a hospital for several months. He referred to this assault in a very casual and light-hearted manner.

XX

SRINAGAR

From Rawalpindi Ramdas went to Srinagar. Here, as on the previous occasions, Ramdas went directly to Pandit Janakinath Bakshi's place. He and his brother, Amarnath Bakshi, were at the bus stand to receive him. Ramdas stayed

in Srinagar, for some days with one brother and then with the other. He met here all the old friends. Ramdas was taken on a pleasure trip to the famous Shalimar and Nishad-bag gardens. Here he also visited Nilkanth Brahmachari, who was ill at the time. Others he saw were Lakshman Jhu, a well-known saint of Kashmir, and a girl devotee who was held in great reverence by the Kashmir Pandits. At the instance of a Bangalore friend, Ramdas went also to see N. Gopalaswamy Iyengar, the then Prime Minister of Kashmir. He received Ramdas cordially. Ramdas had a cup of coffee with him and a few minutes' talk. Ramdas particularly remembers one observation of his. Those were the days of Hindu-Muslim conflicts and the whole of India was in a disturbed state. He said, "There is much talk of bringing about unity between these two major communities of India. In this connection 'mutual tolerance' has been advanced as the means. But the proper way of approach to the problem is to have 'mutual respect', and not 'mutual tolerance' for each other's religion. Then only will unity be possible and friction totally eliminated". These words bring out the truth of the problem.

God's mysterious Lila

One day, when Ramdas was the guest of Amarnath, Sohanlal Severam Jaggi invited Ramdas to his house and arranged for a trip to Chashma Shahi - the king of springs. We started in the afternoon and returned by 7 P.M. Another day, at Amarnath's house Ramdas was sitting alone in the drawing room, when Radhenath, Amarnath's eldest son, came and sat by his side. He started massaging Ramdas' legs gently. While doing so, he asked "Swamiji, have you just returned from uncle's house?"

Ramdas: "No, Ramdas didn't go there. He went to Chashma Shahi with a Punjabi friend."

Radhenath: "How can that be? I saw you, not more than half an hour back, at my uncle's place, where I went to invite my uncle and cousins for tomorrow's feast for Sadhus. There I saw you sitting and talking with my uncle and others. I did not wish to disturb you there and so, leaving a message with my aunt, I left the place. And, now you say that you never went

to my uncle's house - that you had gone to Chashma Shahi. How can that be? How could you be simultaneously at two places; fifteen miles from each other?" Ramdas said, "That is God's Lila. His ways are mysterious!"

When Ramdas was with Amarnath, at his newly built house, he requested the friend to invite for dinner all the Sadhus who were at Srinagar at the time. The dinner was arranged, and Ramdas had the supreme joy, not only of seeing Sadhus of various cults and creeds, sitting for meals in the big hall of Amarnath's house, but also of exchanging a few words with them. Amarnath was in raptures.

Tandra Devi

One day Pandit Janakinath Bakshi spoke to Ramdas about an English lady, who had assumed the name of Tandra Devi, and was wearing an orange-coloured Sari. She lived in a retired spot, far away from the city in a small creek of the Dal Lake in a house-boat called by her "Tandrashram". Pandit Janakinath proposed to take Ramdas to her boat to meet her and also hear the messages of a medium. Ramdas agreed. One day, a party of three of us - Janakinath, another Pandit and Ramdas - hired a boat and proceeded to the place. It took us nearly two hours to reach it. Tandra Devi was glad to see us. She was an elderly woman. There were with her, her son and two daughters and a lad, slim and tall, about 18 years old. Ramdas was introduced to all of them particularly to the last-mentioned young man, who was the medium referred to.

After some casual talk, Tandra Devi suggested that we go up to the terrace of the boat. All of us went there, except the son and the daughters. We sat down on the floor of the small, clean and almost square terrace. Tandra Devi said, pointing to the English lad, "This lad has got a very sensitive nature. He is susceptible to the environments in which he finds himself. He is like a delicate instrument. The slightest external impact produces a disturbance in him. He can hardly live in a city. He likes always clean and tranquil surroundings. In such places he gets possessed by Devas and speaks like prophets. You can see for yourself how all this happens."

Then, we waited for about five minutes, quietly watching. The lad gradually underwent a transformation. His face, which was normally bright, became cloudy, and the smooth skin of the face became wrinkled. His eyes lost much of their lustre. Suddenly, he raised both his hands and clutched at his well-combed hair, pulled at them vigorously, twice or thrice. Then, lowering his hands, he turned to us and started speaking. Words flowed out of him, as in a stream. He spoke about the Impersonal Truth as the highest attainment of human life. We all sat still, quietly listening, until he stopped.

Tandra Devi then put him a question: "Among us who are sitting before you, can you find out who has realized this Truth that you speak of?" He replied, "There is only one who has done so. The others are still groping in the dark, and specially you," he added, looking at Tandra Devi. "You are far, far away from the Truth. You are still enveloped in Maya." Tandra Devi said at once, in all humility, "Yes, brother, I perfectly agree with you. I am still living in ignorance." The Pandits, on the other hand, did not seem to appreciate the judgement passed on them by the English boy.

Ramchand Manchanda of Lahore had asked Pandit Janakinath to ask him the derivation of the word, "Shalimar." As this friend was engaged in a historical research and was interested in the root-meaning of the word, Janakinath asked the boy about it. The boy thought for a while, and said, "Just at this moment, I am unable to give you the meaning. Allow me a week's time." At this, Tandra Devi interposed and stated, "It is true, Devas speak through this medium. But we must not forget that they are not omniscient. Not only that, but they often tell you lies also." Here this strange phenomenon ended. The boy gradually came to the normal. He recovered the glow of his complexion, and the brightness of his eyes and features. We all then came down to the room below, and after a cup of tea got into the boat that was to take us back to Srinagar.

Tandra Devi, out of courtesy, came with us as far as the landing at the other end. She asked Ramdas what he thought of the boy and his talk. Ramdas plainly told her that he did

not like it. He said: "Look here! Ramdas warns you not to permit or encourage the boy to go into such trances." Tandra Devi did not agree. She said that the lad was a specially prepared and trained instrument for this kind of work. Ramdas insisted that in the best interest of the boy, this mediumship business should be stopped, as it would gradually tell upon his health and impair it. Tandra Devi did not agree. We were now nearing the landing place. Ramdas got out of the boat, as also did the Pandits, and bidding good-bye to Tandra Devi, we proceeded to the city.

XXI

NAINI TAL

From Srinagar, Ramdas travelled via Jammu to Naini Tal where he stayed for a day with a devotee, Balmukund Varma. At Naini Tal Ramdas was welcomed by Lt. Col. Sharma and his wife Lila at their bungalow "Kenfield," situated on the hill-top, 7,000 feet high. Ramdas was provided with a small, well-furnished room. During the mornings and evenings, he would sit in the big drawing room, where he met friends who came to see him. Lila and all their children were embodiments of love and devotion. During his stay with them, Ramdas was swimming in an ocean of joy. In the evenings we all used to sit in semi-darkness in Ramdas' room, for singing Ram Nam in chorus, and also for silent meditation. They said they enjoyed thrills of bliss passing through them during that short period. In the evenings, Sharma used to take Ramdas out for walk. Ramdas enjoyed thoroughly the enthralling landscapes of Naini Tal which not only charmed him, but also sent currents of sweet ecstasy right through his physical being. The cold was of course severe. The sky was mostly overcast with dark clouds. At a distance, mist-covered outlines of mountains in various hues were visible. It was altogether a fascinating panorama that unrolled before him in a land of enchantment.

Sharma noticed that Ramdas had to walk bare-foot, on the sloping roads covered with hard pointed gravel. So, he proposed

that Ramdas should wear chappals. For more than fifteen years, Ramdas had not used any footwear. Ramdas objected at first to his proposal. But Sharma persisted and finally Ramdas agreed. He also wanted that Ramdas should use artificial teeth, which would, he said, improve his digestion. The very next day, he got some kind of shoes from the bazaar but they would not suit Ramdas. To have artificial teeth in Naini Tal was out of question as there was no dentist in the town. But the seed was sown, and the harvest was reaped at some other place.

One evening, the Principal of the Sherwood College came to "Kenfield" to have a talk with Ramdas. In the course of conversation, he asked Ramdas about communicating with the spirits of the dead. Ramdas replied he would not like to dabble in these things. "When a man dies, no doubt his spirit survives, but to seek contact with it does not in any way help either the dead person or the person who wishes to communicate with his spirit. On the other hand, for a real spiritual aspirant, the attempt to have such contacts does prove harmful." The Principal agreed with Ramdas.

One day, about an hour before the usual morning meetings in the drawing room of Col. Sharma's house, two Naini Tal friends came to see Ramdas privately. They approached the door of the room and waited. Coming to know of their arrival, Ramdas went out. Seeing one of them, who was standing in front of the other, Ramdas directly went to him and patted him on his broad chest. He was a tall, stout and well-built man. The moment Ramdas touched his chest, he reeled back, uttering the sound "ha" and was about to collapse, when his friend at the back rushed forward and holding him in his arms, led him backwards to the wall of the drawing room and made him sit down and rest. Ramdas watched the scene for a minute and then returned to his room. After a few minutes Ramdas went out again to enquire after the friend. He was now quite well. Ramdas asked him what had happened to him. He said, "You have extraordinary powers. Only now have I come to know of them. When you touched my chest, I felt as though a strong current of electricity passed through me. I could not bear the shock of it. I felt dizzy and was not able to stand firmly on my legs. Had it not been for my friend, who came

in time to hold me, I would have dropped down in a heap on the floor. What did you do to me?" Ramdas replied that he did nothing, that he had merely touched him as he would touch anybody.

Once Sharma, his family and Ramdas went to the Naini Devi's temple for Darshan. We got into a boat on the lake and rowed towards the temple. The lake was like a gleaming gem, set in the valley. Its water was so pure and transparent that the green hills were reflected in it, as in a mirror. The day of Ramdas' departure to Kanpur came. Sharma accompanied Ramdas as far as Rai Bareilly.

XXII

KANPUR - GORAKHPUR - PATNA

At Kanpur Ramdas was the guest of Gangacharan Nigam. Here he met some of the professors of the Dayanand Arya Samaj College. He came to know that Swami Nirbhayanand of Pilikoti Ashram, Chitrakut, was residing in a small house of his own, outside the town, and went to him. We met after a long time, and our joy was so great, that we embraced each other. Ramdas spent about two hours with him.

At Gorakhpur, Ramdas stayed with Ayodhyadas at his bungalow, called "Ananda Bhuvan". Ramdas was asked to answer questions put to him at large gatherings in this house. One day, at the invitation of Jayadaya of the Gita Press, a very devout soul, Ramdas attended Satsang held on the first floor of a huge building near the Gita Press. Here devotees sang sweetly from Tulsidas Ramayana and Jayadaya spoke with his usual devotional feeling, on Bhakti.

Ramdas also paid a visit to the Gita Press, where he met Hanumanprasad Poddar and C. L. Goswami, the editors of "Kalyan" and "Kalyana-Kalpataru." They are both saintly persons. Ramdas had a few minutes' conversation with them. A friend took Ramdas round the press room.

Jwala Prasad accompanied Ramdas from Gorakhpur to Patna. For some distance, we travelled by train and then

crossed a ferry and reached Patna. At the ferry-harbour, Ramdas was received by his host, Vishnubhai M. Thakore, brother of M. M. Thakore, and his elder brother, Swami Advaitanand. Every evening, Vishnubhai's drawing room was full of visitors. A Muslim, by name Abdullah Sahib, also used to come. Ramdas talked to them on various spiritual subjects. Another day, we visited Harmandir, where the famous Guru Govind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, was born in 1666. Ramdas was accompanied by a large party. When he went near that consecrated spot, he felt unusually joyous.

Patna has great historical importance. It is the old Pataliputra, the capital of India, at the time of the Emperors of Maurya Dynasty. Chandragupta and Ashoka ruled India from Pataliputra. Ramdas had here the unique joy of the company of Swami Adwaitanand. Ramdas had heard of him from his brother, M. M. Thakore. Truly, it was a most happy meeting. He is a Sannyasi. His face was radiant with joy.

XXIII

KATRASGARH - CALCUTTA

From Patna Ramdas went to Katrasgarh. As on previous occasions, Ramdas stayed in Katrasgarh with Ratilal M. Dave. There evening Bhajans were attended by a large number of devotees, among whom there was a Dandiswami, who used to come from his quarters, about three miles from Dave's place. The Bhajans were led by a devotee of the place, who used to go into raptures, whenever he sang Mirabai's songs, playing on a harmonium. The Dandiswami once remarked, "My renunciation is nothing before the devotional fervour with which this friend loses himself in the love of Sri Krishna. I feel ashamed of myself in his presence." Ramdas, one day, visited the Swami's residence, and spent a blissful hour with him.

At Katrasgarh Ramdas went down a coal mine, and saw how coal was extracted and conveyed to the top. The ground excavated was cool, but the air there was stuffy. He also visited some merchant friends in the town. Ratilal Dave,

his brothers and all the members of his family were overflowing with love and devotion.

Calcutta was the place next visited. Here Ramdas was the guest of P. Shivshankar Rao. He met many old friends and was invited to their houses. Special mention may be made of his visit to H. D. Vasudev, brother-in-law of Col. A. N. Sharma. He lent his car to us for a trip to Belur Math and Dakshineshwar. Ramdas saw the huge temple erected for the installation of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's image. The temple is a marvel of modern oriental architecture. Ramdas also went round the grounds surrounding the Belur Math and spent some quiet moments in front of Swami Vivekananda's Samadhi. Naturally, the place was perfectly peaceful.

Ramdas' visit to Dakshineshwar was also a blissful one. We walked round the temples and stayed for a few hours in the holy room once occupied by Ramakrishna Paramahansa. At the moment, a devotee was worshipping a picture of the Paramahansa in that room. Truly, even after the departure of a saint from the earthly life, there remains, behind him, an abiding influence in the environment in which he has once lived. This is pre-eminently felt by ardent devotees and Sadhakas who go to these places and breathe in the pure and uplifting atmosphere there. Ramdas' memory was revived when he witnessed these familiar scenes for the third time. The first experience was absolutely thrilling and wonderful, as described in his book, "In Quest of God".

A planchette prediction

M. Subba Rao of Bombay came on a hurried visit to Calcutta to see Ramdas. He said that he had heard a report from Karachi that on the planchette it had been predicted that Ramdas' body would drop off soon during the year. Afraid that he might have no chance of meeting Ramdas again, in case the prediction came true, he had run up to Calcutta to spend a few days with him. Also, a letter came about the same time, from Pandit Janakinath of Srinagar stating that the English lad, the medium adopted by the English lady, Tandra Devi, had said that Ramdas would shortly pass through a severe crisis, and

that, after coming out of it, he would rise to the highest spiritual eminence.

XXIV

BOMBAY - SECUNDERABAD

Ramdas had an invitation from B. Byramji to visit Nagpur on his way down to South India. He now sent letters and telegrams to this friend at Nagpur but failed to get a reply. At last a wire came from him, from Bombay, asking Ramdas to spend with him there, the days which he would have spent at Nagpur. Agreeing to this request, Ramdas came again to Bombay.

By this time, Ramdas' health was gradually deteriorating. He was hardly able to digest even the simplest food. However, he travelled all the way from Calcutta to Bombay, at one stretch. In the train, he got fever on the second day of travel, and could hardly take any nourishment. Meanwhile, Ramdas had consented to a crowded programme of five days chalked out by the friends at Bombay. He reached the city in a weak state of health. Byramji took Ramdas to his flat. He and his wife were all love and kindness. For the night Byramji had arranged a music concert by G. N. Joshi, a favourite singer of Bombay. His music started at 12 midnight and went on till 4 a.m. Owing to fever, Ramdas had no rest in the train for two days. For lack of sleep, he was feeling giddy and still he had to sit up till that late hour. The next morning, started a regular round of visits and functions. G. N. Joshi, that day, took Ramdas to the recording department of "His Master's Voice" Gramophone Company, and explained to him the process of recording.

Again, on the second night, there was a music concert by a wellknown singer, Mrs. Hirabai Barodekar. She is considered to be one of the most talented musicians of India. Her voice is melodious and she sings with great devotion. She has the power to attract not only the ear of the listener, but also his heart. Some of the hearers would sit spell-bound, when she sings. Her music went on till 5 a.m.

Bombay friends had announced in the papers, and distributed handbills to the effect, that Ramdas would deliver a speech at Laxmi Bagh, New Bhatwadi, on Universal Religion. The hall was fairly full. Among the audience, Ramdas found a bearded friend, with a turban, who was the Principal of the Khalsa College, Bombay. Ramdas was feeling weak and exhausted, and could hardly raise his voice so as to enable all the people in front of him to hear him distinctly. Still he tried to speak as audibly as possible. In the course of his speech, he tried to prove that all religions point to the same goal and agree in their fundamental teachings. Towards the end of this speech, he spoke on his favourite subject, the Divine Name. When Ramdas was growing ecstatic over the glory of the Name, the Sikh Principal, Sardar Kashmir Singh, looked a different being. He drew nearer, his face lit up with a strange glow. He showed how the disciples of Guru Nanak Dev love the Name.

After the speech was over, this friend approached Ramdas and, with folded hands in salutation, said, "Swamiji, I was simply charmed to hear what you said in praise of God's Name. I wish so much that you pay a visit to our College. Please promise me that you will come tomorrow, at any time convenient to you." It was decided that he should go to the college the next day in the afternoon. The Principal was waiting at the gate to receive Ramdas with all love and humility. He took Ramdas round and introduced him to his colleagues and students. He also gave him some cool drinks. Ramdas has even now a vivid memory of the delightful visit. It was not so much the college, as the society of that great devotee of Guru Nanak Dev that brought sweetness to the occasion.

From Bombay Ramdas went to Secunderabad, where he stayed with C. C. Paul, a Christian friend, who had been wishing for a long time to meet Ramdas. He made Ramdas' stay with him as comfortable as possible. He arranged programmes in such a way that for some period in the afternoon, Ramdas could have perfect rest. Ramdas' health was still not good. The Hindu devotees of Secunderabad came to see Ramdas every day in large numbers in the evenings, from 8 to 10 p.m. There were

larger gatherings on the terrace of his bungalow, where questions were asked. Ramdas had a lively time answering them.

Rev. Arthur Massey

Ramdas has specially to mention here his meeting with Reverend Arthur Massey. He was an English priest and mystic. But he was perfectly catholic in his views. He had a high regard for Hindu religion and Indian saints. He was conducting a Sevashram, in East Godavari, where he was tenderly looking after a number of crippled and disabled children. His heart was with the suffering humanity. He was a most unassuming person. Even when he was here on earth, it was evident from the self-sacrificing life he led that he belonged to the other world. Ramdas felt very happy in his company. He used to attend regularly the evening gatherings.

C. C. Paul took Ramdas one day to the Orphanage founded by him. There he saw a number of houses in which poor, disabled and helpless orphans were accommodated. Some Christian sisters attended on them with all love and care. Whenever the orphans saw Paul, they would run towards him as children to their mother, and show their joy. This service was really God's service. Ramdas felt blessed at the sight, and silently invoked the Lord to pour His grace on the institution and its founder.

Sympathy for 'the fallen'

Ramdas met here an European, who was a servant of the poor. Ramdas was glad to hear him talk about the helpless and the destitute. Then, he paid a visit to a Home for the so-called 'fallen' women, conducted by an English lady. Society had disowned these women, on account of their moral lapses. Here, a word will not be out of place about the cruelty which society inflicted on these helpless women. While the males who commit the same offence go scot-free, the society tolerating them, the women alone are treated as outcastes. They are denied sympathy, forgiveness and protection by the society which quotes scriptural injunctions forged by selfish, narrow-minded, heartless religionists, who distort the pure and glorious teachings of the ancient Rishis and later saints. The hearts of saints and

sages are as soft as a flower and their love for all beings in distress is deep, abiding and universal. Truly, we have to place before us, for guidance, the golden motto: "To err is human. to forgive Divine".

A young man came one day to see Ramdas. He fell at Ramdas' feet and laid his head on them. The moment he did so, he was seized with an uncontrollable ecstasy, and for some minutes rolled on the floor in a fit of emotion, all the while uttering loudly the name "Krishna" and calling out to Ramdas, "Save me!" After he became calm and sat up, Ramdas spoke to him a few words of solace and encouragement.

God-realization a birthright

One of the visitors, a boy whose name Ramdas remembers to be Krishnamurti, asked Ramdas, "Am I destined to realize God?" Ramdas replied: "Every human being, by the mere fact that he is born as such, has a right to realize God. Realization of God depends upon a man's aspiration to have Him. If the aspiration is sufficiently strong, it will not take him long to have His Darshan." Ramdas then advised him to cultivate an intense yearning for God and constantly take His sweet and holy Name. Ramdas also initiated him into the Ram Mantra.

XXV

VIJAYAWADA - NANDYAL

The next place Ramdas visited was Vijayawada, then known as Bezwada. C. C. Paul accompanied Ramdas to this place. Ramdas stayed here with Narharidas, a poor compounder of the local Veterinary hospital, who lived in a small tenement, with a narrow verandah and two small rooms. It was a change from a palace to a hut. C. C. Paul noticed this. But, his love for Ramdas, it seemed, grew only greater by Ramdas' coming to a humble and poor man's cottage. The love and devotion with which Narharidas and his wife received Ramdas was simply sublime.

In this connection, Ramdas remembers the incident in Sri Krishna's life, when instead of accepting the invitation of King

Duryodhana with all his luxuries, He went uninvited to the cottage of His ideal devotee, Vidura. Here He took the simple fare offered by Vidura's wife. It is said that she was so overpowered with joy on seeing Krishna that she almost lost herself, and while feeding Him with her own hands, she put into His mouth the skin of the plantains, dropping the fruits down. Krishna - the wonderful Krishna - quietly ate the skins and found them delicious. God does not care for wealth, name, fame and position. He wants only pure love and devotion. He is love-hungry - "*prem-ka-bhooka*". Ramdas spent two quiet days with Narharidas, without the rush and crowds of visitors, enjoying the vast space surrounding the hut and the low hills that bounded them.

At Nandyal where Ramdas went next, he was the guest of a friend, Narasimhacharlu, a prominent vakil of that place. This friend took Ramdas round the whole town in a procession. His idea was that all people in Nandyal should see Ramdas. A public meeting was arranged in a local temple, known as Sri Nagareshwaraswami Temple. Ramdas spoke on Bhakti and self-surrender for about three quarters of an hour.

A Vakil's tears

One of the devotees in the gathering, a vakil, came to Ramdas later on and said, "I am tired of my profession, because, for the sake of my clients, I have to act often against the dictates of my conscience. I must confess that my life is such that I am a mere creature of circumstance." Saying this, he began shedding tears. Ramdas consoled him with these words, "You should surrender yourself to the will of the Lord, by repeating His name and He will see that you lead a pure, noble and peaceful life."

Ramdas was also invited to deliver short discourses in the local High School and Ladies' Association. Again, another gathering was arranged in a temple. Here the place was overcrowded. After the meeting, a group of devotees from about a dozen villages came to see Ramdas. They said that there was no chance for them to speak with Ramdas or hear his words of advice, as he could speak to them only in the English language, which they did not know. But, they said, they were satisfied

with his Darshan. They had come from long distances, in inclement weather, undergoing all kinds of discomfort on the way. They stayed only for a few minutes and left.

XXVI

KURNOOL - ANANTAPUR

In Kurnool which was next visited, Ramdas stayed with Rangacharlu. He was invited to the houses of a few vakil friends. One of them was Ramakrishna Rao who used to visit Anandashram every year twice or thrice. During one of the visits, he put Ramdas a straight question, "Swamiji, is it possible for me to realize God, continuing my profession as a lawyer? To tell you the truth, I have no heart in the work I am doing at present." Ramdas asked him why it was so. He said, "In the course of my pleading for my clients, I have got to depart from truth. I know this kind of life is not at all favourable to my progress on the spiritual path." Then, Ramdas quoted the words of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, "There is no salvation for a lawyer and a doctor." The Paramahansa must have said this because a lawyer had to tell lies for defending his clients, while the doctor egoistically asserted that he would definitely cure his patients, leaving God entirely out of account. When the friend heard this, he became dejected and deeply thoughtful. When next time he came to the Ashram he had light on his face and his heart was free. He told Ramdas that he had retired from his profession, and was engaged in prayers and devotional practices throughout the day. Now, he rarely comes to the Ashram. But Ramdas feels that his heart is with him or, it may be said, that he has found Ramdas in his heart.

Ramdas included Anantapur in his tour programme, at the pressing and loving request of D. Nagesh Rao. He was accorded a hearty welcome by several friends of Anantapur. At this time, Nagesh's baby had died. According to the Hindu custom, all the members of a family, where a death occurred, are considered to be under pollution for 10 days and not allowed physical contacts with others. As Ramdas was about to embrace Nagesh Rao, this fact was brought to his notice. But all the

same, Ramdas gave him a hearty embrace, and said, "Who is polluted? Who can pollute Ram?" The friends were no doubt surprised at Ramdas' behaviour. But their love for him was so great that this deliberate act on his part to break an age-long custom, did not affect them.

One evening a meeting was arranged in Dattatreya Samaj-am. Ramdas was asked to deliver a discourse on the Divine Name and its glory. A discourse was arranged another day at the New Municipal High School for the benefit of the students. Ramdas said, in the course of his speech, that he had been visiting many places in India with the mission of spreading the glory of the Divine Name. He found nowhere provision made for religious instruction in schools. A strong moral and spiritual background was necessary for a useful and harmonious life. Students should aim at living a spiritual life. As it was, their one ambition after studies was only to earn their bread. That, however, was not the be-all and the end-all of their existence. To live a happy life, purity was essential. Purity could not be attained without discipline. Purity was of thought, speech and action. It was the basis for being in tune with the Infinite. Thinking well of others was purity of thought. To speak gently and truthfully was purity of speech and serving fellowmen was purity of action. Ramdas concluded his speech with these words, "Get up early in the morning and pray to the Almighty Power to grant you strength to lead a pure life, and infuse into your hearts divine peace and joy. The easy way to keep your mind imbued with the thought of God is to repeat His holy Name."

World peace through prayer

Some friends who were with Ramdas at his residence, one day asked him about world peace and the possibility of a Government being run on a non-violent basis. Ramdas replied: "Himsa and Ahimsa are the obverse and reverse of the same Truth. One cannot exist without the other. But in the case of a Self-realized soul the distinction does not exist. He is lost in the one universal consciousness. It must be noted that progress means movement on the twin wheels of creation and destruction. Before the tree comes forth, the seed is destroyed.

Wars, however, can be avoided if a majority of the people in the world strongly willed that they should not fight, but must live in peace. This strength of will is developed by a heart-felt prayer to God on the part of every one. Peace can come through such united prayers for the welfare of humanity." Ramdas also added: "Whatever happens has the sanction of the merciful Providence and is therefore necessary. The world is progressing and when a crisis comes, a new consciousness dawns."

Another question asked was: "Is Vishvarupa Darshan so terrible as to make a hero of the type of Arjuna shudder and pray for His personal Avataric form?"

Ramdas replied, "Yes, Vishvarupa Darshan is terrible to the ego-bound soul. This experience comes to every devotee, when the universal vision dawns on him and his time-space consciousness vanishes. As this vision destroys the ego-self, which resists destruction, there is fear. Arjuna, in spite of his physical courage, was not free from fear in the realm of the spirit. Hence his terror."

Another friend recounted to Ramdas his personal difficulties and said that his condition would not have been so bad, if he were not an orphan. Ramdas told him there was really no orphan in the world, because God is the eternal father and mother of every creature in it. By trusting Him one gets immediate relief

Ramdas was one day taken to Sri Vishweshwar Temple, where over three hundred persons had gathered. At the time Ramdas went there, one Krishnamacharya, a former lecturer of Banaras, who had dedicated his life to the propagation of Sanatana Dharma, was speaking. Ramdas heard him for about fifteen minutes. He spoke in English with great eloquence and his language was superb. After his speech Ramdas said:

Knowledge brings freedom

"The world is full of people who say, there is no God. If there is one such here in this gathering, Ramdas should like to see him. To convince people by argument that God exists is difficult, although Nature before us is proclaiming His existence every moment. That this vast universe would not exist

but for a Supreme Cause is an undeniable fact. God is inherent in every being. But for Him, we cannot exist even for a second. He alone has real knowledge, who knows that all creatures are manifestations of One Supreme Being. Just as one sun is reflected as many in the water contained in many pots, so also does the one Almighty manifest Himself in and as all creatures in the world. He who knows this truth sees underlying unity and does not differentiate between himself and another. He is above the sense of duality - "I" and "Thou". The ignorant man, on the other hand, does not see the unity and so is always in conflict with others. The sense of separation breeds intolerance, envy and other evils leading to mutual hatred and feuds. But the man of knowledge finds peace in the peace of the world, and joy in the joy of the world. Knowledge brings freedom and joy. This bliss of emancipation is the birthright of one and all. The Divine Name is the easiest and the most potent means for realizing it. Bhakti is the great need for all alike, be he a dualist, a monotheist or a qualified monotheist. The grand car of Bhakti rolls on the wheels of Namasmaraṇa, Bhajan, Worship and Service. It leads its votaries straight to the Divine. Ramdas can definitely state that one and all, without any distinction of caste, creed, sex or status, can take up the name of God, which is the mainstay of the entire humanity here and hereafter."

XXVII

MADRAS

From Anantapur Ramdas came to Madras. Here Ramdas stayed with Dr. G. S. Katre, in his spacious bungalow. Ramdas' health had by now deteriorated considerably and he was getting fever daily. But it was God's will that he should go through the heavy programme set for him by the Madras friends. Among the visits Ramdas paid was one to M. S. Kamath's house. Kamath was the Founder-Editor of the "Sunday Times". He was anxious to meet Ramdas. He was seriously ill at the time. Ramdas spent some ten minutes with him. He felt very happy. But, as willed by God, soon after this meeting, news came that he had expired. He was a great devotee of Ramana Maharshi.

A problem in Evolution

Ramdas also visited the house of Dr. M. Keshava Pai, a devout soul who had started a Gita Circle in Madras, for the study of Gita. On the occasion of Ramdas' visit, the doctor invited all the members of the Gita Circle for an evening party, when there was a talk about evolution and Karma. The question raised was whether in the evolution of the soul there could come a time when it would be retrograde; or was it proceeding onwards, ever rising from the lower forms of life to higher ones. For some time Ramdas silently listened to the discussion and then referred to the instance of Jada Bharata, who had to be born as a deer in his next birth because of his attachment to a deer. The emperor sage had to descend down the scale and take an animal body. That showed, Ramdas argued, that the evolution of the soul was not always an upward course. Sometimes, the soul came down to a lower plane and it might again rise as the story of Jada Bharata revealed, with an intensified aspiration. So, this going backward did not prove an impediment but added momentum to the evolution of the soul, helping it to reach the goal more quickly.

Through the kindness of Dr. Keshava Pai, Ramdas got here a new and well-fitting set of artificial teeth. During the Bhajan, a Telugu friend, V. K. Pantulu by name, used to sing choice devotional songs of Maharashtra saints.

At Madras, one day, Swami Bharatanand came to see Ramdas and put many questions. One of them was about the war then going on between China and Japan. He wanted to know Ramdas' attitude towards such events. Ramdas told him that in his eyes, every one was God, the same Atman. There was no question of Chinese or Japanese, neither good nor bad. He therefore looked upon everything as a pure Lila of the Lord.

Q: "Does Ramdas ever lose sight of Ram?"

A: "Never!"

Q: "Not even in his sleep?"

A: "No; it is one perfect bliss. Formerly, there were occasions when Ramdas missed the Divine Presence. He would then weep and grow wild; but that state is over."

Q: "When the present body wears off, will Ramdas come again?"

A: "Yes, he wants to, not because of any compulsion, but for the joy of Lila."

Q: "Does Ramdas get tired or bored when people worry him, or feel dejected when his body is ill?"

A: "Ramdas enjoys being pestered with questions. As to illness, he was not well yesterday and the day before. You had better ask these friends if he was dejected."

Ramdas said: "One of the ways of controlling the mind is, that the devotee should let it go wherever it pleases, but he should identify every object of his thought with God. Then, the God-consciousness alone will remain and the object as such will disappear. This is true of every thought; the ultimate result will be that all the while God-thought alone will rule supreme in the mind, to the exclusion of all other thoughts. This practice brings concentration and tranquility to the restless mind. Verily, the whole universe is His manifestation. The Divine is seated in the heart of all beings and things. Ramdas has tried this method himself and found it most helpful."

"Another method is to stand apart and be a witness of the mind. When you say that you cannot control the mind, you unknowingly feel that you are not the mind. All that you need therefore to do is to watch the mind and stand apart from its antics. The mind will then gradually wear itself out and get stilled."

"Happiness, as the world understands it, consists of possessing and using things. But the Bhakta's happiness is not of this kind. For him, remembering God is happiness, and forgetting Him, misery. And, when he forgets God, he feels like a fish out of water. Such Bhakti is called Ananya Bhakti. Such devotion can be secured through the contact of saints. When this stage is reached, the devotee becomes one with God and Bhakti terminates in Jnana. Jnana is the flower of the tree of which Bhakti is the root, and Vairagya the trunk. When the self of the devotee merges into the Infinite Consciousness, he reaches a stage in which the whole universe is apprehended as the dynamic manifestation of the same static, calm and all-

pervading Reality. This is the acme of spiritual achievement and is called Para-Bhakti."

Q: "Of the many saints that one meets, how can one recognise one's own Guru?"

Ramdas: "You need not bother about it. Your heart will tell you."

Q: "But very often the heart is a fickle guide. It attaches itself to various people."

Ramdas: "What does it matter? The Guru is not a body."

Q: "But, some maintain that one must be loyal to one's Guru, even as the wife is to her husband?"

Ramdas: "If you see the same Guru in everyone, the question of disloyalty does not arise."

Q: "Why is it that of the many who come to a saint, only a few are attracted? Does it depend on the receptivity of the aspirant or is there a selection on the saint's part?"

Ramdas: "The sun shines equally on all and yet its light is reflected variously by various objects. Is there any partiality on the part of the sun? The same is the case with saints. Those who are prepared more, receive more. And yet Guru Nanak says that Grace is omnipotent. It does not depend on the Adhikara of the disciple. If it did it would not be all-powerful."

Q: "What has Ramdas to say about it?"

Ramdas: "Ramdas thinks that as a rule Grace works under limitations. But it can certainly transform even the hardest sinner in an instant - by a mere glance or a touch. It is quite possible, however, that in such a case, the preparatory stage was passed in a previous life."

XXVIII

CUDDALORE - BANGALORE - ANANDASHRAM

Mrs. Umabai Ranganathan took Ramdas from Madras to Cuddalore. At the railway station, he was received by Ranganathan. Ramdas lodged in the first floor of the big bungalow,

built by Lord Clive, now occupied by Ranganathan. Ramdas' health had by this time well-nigh broken down. One day, when he was sitting on a cot, engaged in a talk with Ranganathan, he fainted. Ranganathan became strict thereafter in regard to the visits of friends and in the matter of going to their houses in response to their invitation.

Ramdas' visit, in the company of Ranganathan to the Bala Gurukul at Cuddalore started by Duncan Greenlees, was a memorable one. After Ramdas took his seat on a mat arranged for him, the children of the school recited their prayer. Then, Ramdas went round the dormitories. Ramdas saw in one of the cottages, on the front wall, a splendid prayer "Life of my life!" by Dr. Tagore, and read it with great delight. As Ramdas was about to leave the institution, he said, "Ramdas has spent a very happy day here. He has been swimming in an ocean of love." To this Duncan Greenlees replied, "Ramdas brings his own ocean with him."

A pupil's letter

A boy named Nellikuppam, who was studying in the Gurukul, at the first sight of Ramdas, adopted him as his grandfather and voiced his sentiments towards Ramdas in a spontaneous letter given below:

My dear Grand Father,

We are thanks you for you come today. Thank you again. You come to day in my School, we think a happiness. My friends and my brothers my thank you. You give blessing to me with my brothers and me teachers. We thought in my school to day we are very happy, because, you come to day.

I am

Yours Grand Son

To Sri Ramdas.

Ramdas found that the Gurukul was conducted in the traditions of ancient India. He loved all the inmates and they reciprocated his love with ardour.

From Cuddalore, Ramdas went to Salem. Here he spent a night with Dr. Ramaswamy, who was kind enough to take him by car to Bangalore the next day. Here, Ramdas stayed at "Vithal Mandir". Ramdas' diet had now been reduced to Horlicks milk. Even this he found it hard to digest. His physical condition was very weak. Narasimha Rao Naidu requested Ramdas to spend some days at his house. Ramdas consented.

The rush of visitors at Naidu's place was so great that, to give rest to Ramdas, the doors of the first floor rooms, which Ramdas was occupying, had to be closed. At this time, one day, owing to excessive weakness, Ramdas nearly swooned and was about to drop down on the cot, when he was supported by Naidu and Sitabai who were with him. Next day, again, there was a heavy rush of visitors. Ramdas called Naidu to his side in the morning and asked him, "Don't you think it would be well, if Ramdas cancels the programme of going to Mysore and Shimoga and returns to Anandashram this evening itself? This long tour has completely tired out this body and it is not in a fit condition to bear any further strain. Ramdas proposes to start today by mail. If you agree, we shall send telegrams to various places to this effect. You will have to accompany Ramdas to the Ashram." This was also in consonance with the motherly advice given to Ramdas by Umadevi, a devout mother, when she met him at Gopal Rao's house the previous day. She had said, "I beg of you, on bended knees, in the name of Krishnabai, to return to Anandashram, immediately, as the state of your health is very bad."

Ramdas at last reached Kanhangad station, where Mataji and many other Ashramites were waiting for him. At this time Ramdas was hardly able to walk. Naidu had to hold him by the arm and conduct him to the taxi. After reaching the Ashram, Mataji led Ramdas to the Bhajan Mandir.

Here closes the third tour of Ramdas, on 20th September, 1938.

TOUR - 1949

XXIX

BANGALORE - MYSORE

Ramdas' illness continued for about four years. His recovery was very slow. In the meanwhile, friends from various parts of India were persistently agitating for Ramdas' going on tour to their places. But, his one reply to all of them was: "God does not will it so."

In 1949, Ramdas got a letter from Prince Pratapsinh of Limbdi, who was suffering from a prolonged illness. He had come to Bangalore for a change. Ramdas had known him intimately during several visits to Limbdi. His father was a great friend of Ramdas. The prince wrote a pathetic letter to Ramdas to go to him at Bangalore as he keenly wished to see Ramdas. At first, Ramdas was not inclined to give him a favourable reply, but later on, he was impelled from within to go to Bangalore in response to the call.

In the previous years, Mataji did not accompany Ramdas in his tours. But, on this tour, she desired to be with Ramdas in order to take care of his health. When the tour was decided on and the date of departure fixed, the Ashramites felt greatly pained at the separation and there was a lot of wailing and crying over it. This showed the depth of their love and affection for us. It usually happens that the pent-up feeling of devotion bursts out only when an occasion arises for it.

In June 1949, Ramdas accompanied by Mataji, Principal Butani, Sriram, Motiben and Ramkishore, left the Ashram. Prince Pratapsinhji's eldest son, Janaksinh, had come to the Ashram to take us in his car from Kasaragod to Bangalore. We reached Bangalore halting for the night at Mysore on the way.

Prince Pratapsinhji and his family were delighted to see us. They welcomed us with all love and hospitality. We occupied a part of the house on the ground floor, in which the prince lived.

Ramdas was led into a side-room in the bungalow and he sat down on the seat prepared for him. By his side, at a short distance, the prince sat. He asked Ramdas to explain to him the meaning of Swami Rama Tirtha's saying: 'A slave is a slave because he is free'. Ramdas explained that the slave referred to by Swami Rama Tirtha was a slave of God. Truly, when one becomes the slave of God, he becomes free, ever taken care of by his master - God. Such a slave-devotee or Das of God, owing to his inner freedom, ever remains happy and blissful.

We met here also the Maharaja of Porbandar.

Maharani's Questions

The Dowager Maharani of Mysore came to see Ramdas at the bungalow. She was a devout lady deeply interested in the worship and reading of Scriptures, and a believer in the efficacy of the society of saints. Among the many questions she put to Ramdas the first one was: "How can we believe that God exists, that He spoke to His devotees and revealed Himself to them."

Ramdas replied: "God does manifest Himself to His nearest and dearest devotees. There is also enough evidence to show that God spoke to them frequently. In Ramdas' own case, he had come face to face with God and he was conversing with Him. God did talk with him."

The next question from the Maharani was: "How to attain this lofty state?"

Ramdas replied, "This happens only when God's grace pours on a devotee. He will be blessed by His Darshan as a result of his unceasing remembrance of Him. Complete surrender to God's will brings about a total transformation of His devotee. Guru and God are one. God's grace means Guru's grace."

To another question of the Maharani, Ramdas said: "God is called (in Hindi) Khuda, that is *Khud-aanewala*, or One who comes of His own accord. Through the association of saints, Grace comes to you and God-vision becomes possible."

We were joined here by Swami Chinmayananda of Bengal, a sweet and charming singer. His devotional songs used to send the listeners into raptures. Every evening, Bhajan was held in the inner courtyard of the bungalow attended by hundreds of Bangalore devotees. We were virtually swimming in an ocean of love and joy.

This being Mataji's first visit to Bangalore, devoted ladies of the place flocked round her.

At the request of the Dowager Maharani, Ramdas paid a visit to the Bangalore Palace where Ramdas met also the Maharaja of Mysore. Ramdas was led to the shrine room of the Dowager Maharani where she daily carried on her prayers and worship. The Maharani of Gondal and the landlord of the bungalow in which the prince of Limbdi lived also invited Ramdas to their houses. The Maharaja of Porbandar was also constantly in our company. His humility and devotion were indeed exemplary for one of his high status. Another day, we paid a visit to Swami Hariharanand Bharati of Sri Anant Swami Math in Bangalore, at his invitation. The enthralling Kirtan of the Swamiji and his exposition in Kannada of the Tulsidas Ramayan kept thousands of listeners spell-bound.

One evening we went to the local Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, where Bhajan was held followed by a short welcome speech and Prasad distribution. We also attended the Bhajan at Sri P. Rajagopal's. There were visits also to the Asakta Poshak Sabha and other institutions for public uplift. A devotee known to Mataji and Ramdas desired that we should visit her house. She was very sad that this may not be possible for want of time and stood one morning before Ramdas with gloomy face. Ramdas then told her that he would go to her house. And he did so. Really, pure devotion is so potent that the devotee gets everything done by its power. After some time, Ramdas left the place. She was supremely happy over the visit.

More questions

One evening, as Ramdas was sitting silent for a long time, friends who had come to see him, drew him out, by putting him these questions:

Q: Where is God?

Ramdas: God is within yourself.

Q: How to find Him?

Ramdas: Look within.

Q: What are the means?

Ramdas: Chanting of Ram Nam.

Q: What is your message for today?

Ramdas: Take Ram Nam; this message is not only for today but for all days.

One lady among the visitors sitting in front of Ramdas asked him whether one should believe in incarnations. Ramdas replied that incarnations were true. When humanity is in distress, God does descend in a human form to bring relief, solace and peace to them in the distracted world.

During his stay in Bangalore, Ramdas visited Devrao Shivram Ubhayakar who was bedridden with illness. Ramdas stayed with him for about an hour. He was a great devotee whose philanthropic activities were wellknown. He was held in high regard and esteem by the people of Bangalore. He was an ardent follower of the Chitrapur Math and had great devotion for Srimat Anandashram Swamiji.

Before Ramdas left Bangalore, the prince of Limbdi, who was till then hardly able to stand up, was, by God's grace, able to move about unaided. During Ramdas' stay with him, his house was crowded with visitors from early hours in the morning till late in the night. The prince received Ram Nam from Ramdas with full trust and devotion.

From Bangalore Ramdas and party proceeded to Mysore escorted by Seth Munshilal and Rama Iyer and lodged in their hotel, Sri Chamundeshwari Bhavan. Here, in the big hall of the hotel, Bhajan and Kirtans were held regularly every morn-

ing and evening. Once, because of the huge gathering, the Bhajan was held in the open square in front of the Chamundeshwari building.

In the course of his talks at Chamundeshwari Bhavan, Ramdas recalled the case of a rich Jain merchant who wanted Ramdas to show him Ram. Ramdas asked him to give his mind for getting the vision of Ram. The Seth hesitated and ultimately owned his inability to part with his mind. People wish to enjoy the transitory pleasures of the world and at the same time to obtain the Darshan of God.

Among the places visited were Krishnarajasagar Dam, the Ramakrishna Hostel and the Sai Baba Mandir. At the Mandir the crowd was so great that every inch of the space inside the Mandir was packed to the full. Bhajan and Puja went on on a grand scale. Ramdas again met the Dowager Maharani of Mysore and the Maharaja of Bhavnagar at the Mysore palace where the Maharaja lived and had lunch with him. There was also Bhajan by Swami Chinmayananda.

One day, an old lady came to see Mataji and Ramdas. She had no one to look after her except her widowed daughter-in-law who earned very little by spinning. Mataji asked her to have breakfast with her and when she took leave, she was given a bag-ful of eatables. The old lady exclaimed: "Why do you fill my bag with these? Why not fill my heart with God-remembrance?"

On coming back to Bangalore from Mysore, Ramdas and party stayed with Sri Sarangapani Mudaliar. There was a Bhajan programme at the Ram Mandir in Malleswaram. The big hall was crowded with thousands of devotees. A Bhajan was also held at the bungalow of Sri Krishnaswami Ayyangar.

On Mudaliar's suggestion it was decided to travel to Bombay by air. This was the first time that Mataji and Ramdas were to fly by plane. We anticipated the flight with a certain amount of thrill. We started early in the morning. Many Bangalore devotees were present at the airport, including Prince Pratapsinh. We got into the plane. The plane rose. We waved handkerchiefs in response to the raised hands from the vast number of devotees at the airport.

XXX

HAKIMPET AIRPORT (HYDERABAD)

The plane landed at th. Hakimpet aerodrome, Hyderabad. Ramdas saw a surging mass of people awaiting our arrival on the air-field. There were loud "jai-jai-kars" from the crowd. A few devotees came forward and clamoured for our alighting from the plane for Darshan. Mataji and Ramdas came out of the plane and as we touched the ground, we were dragged, as it were, in the midst of the thick crowd of thousands of devotees to a place about half a furlong from the plane, where they had made seating arrangements.

Ramdas sat on a chair, Mataji sitting behind on a bench. Then the Darshan started. As people came forward to touch our feet, chaos set in. In the vast gathering, there were men, women and children. In the rush for Darshan, the devotees clashed against each other, trampled over one another and, in the stampede, children had the worst of it. Their cries and shrieks were heard above the din and noise created by the confusion. The crowd became unmanageable although some leaders among them tried to bring about order. This went on for about 20 minutes. The plane was to start on its onward journey to Bombay after a stoppage of only 20 minutes at the Hakimpet airport.

Meanwhile, about three or four dozens of friends belonging to the official and higher class were awaiting in a deputation at the airport to receive us. They had brought all kinds of refreshments for us. They were simply looking on the scene before them helplessly. Access to us from their side or from us to them was impossible. The time for departure came. Five minutes more passed and the crowd was still pouring on us for Darshan and even more Darshan. Ramdas got up, as also Mataji, to go to the plane. But, where was the way? The Darshan was not over. The officers of the aeroplane were shouting hoarse for us to board the plane as ten minutes more had passed beyond the scheduled time of departure. We pushed through the crowd against tremendous resistance and made

headway as best as we could and reached the plane. With the help of some strong people, we somehow got into it.

Now a climax was reached. A huge mob followed us towards the plane and surrounded it. Where was the possibility of taking off? There was further delay. The pilots were thoroughly exasperated. A loud and united voice rose from the crowd: "We will allow the plane to go only if you and Mataji promise to come to us, on your return journey." Ramdas had no plans to return by the Hyderabad route. So, he hesitated to reply them in the affirmative. Time was passing and the plane officers were getting more and more restless and excited. They came to Ramdas and asked him to give the mob the promise they wanted so that the plane might start. Ramdas had no other alternative but to acquiesce in the request of the Hyderabad devotees. Ramdas stood on the top step of the ladder and with raised hands, shouted to the crowd that he would return to them when the Bombay-Saurashtra tour was over.

That instant the crowd receded and melted as mist in the sun. The plane made its usual buzzing sound and after running for a while rose slowly up and up. The friends who came to see us with refreshments remained in the aerodrome, gazing at the upward flight of the plane!

Such a huge crowd of devotees assembled at the airport grounds at Hakimpet. Very likely the news of it was flashed across to some devotees in Hyderabad through the medium of the Radio and newspapers by some interested friends.

XXXI

BOMBAY

We reached Bombay 20 minutes late. The party was escorted from the airport to 'Ivorine' where Natvarlal G. Parikh and his family lived. We had previously intimated to him of our intention to stay with him when we visited Bombay. It appears, when he got the intimation first, he expressed his surprise: "Is he (Ramdas) really coming to Bombay and residing

with us?" Bansidhar G. Parikh was also present at the airport to receive us.

The meeting with Bombay friends, after a lapse of 11 years, was delightful. One can well imagine their joy when they found Mataji, Ramdas and party in their midst. Ramdas cannot fail to make special mention here of our veteran friend U. Sanjiva Rao. Whenever he had time he was frequently coming to Ivorine to see us. Visitors poured in like a stream from morning till late in the evening. Bhajan programmes were regularly held, conducted by Swami Chinmayananda and Ganesh Heblekar. The atmosphere was vibrant with spiritual fervour. On one occasion, Master Vasant of Rajkot also sang in the Bhajan. Murugadas and Devendranath were among the other singers. And last but not least, Ustad Vilayat Khan, the master player on Sitar, too came one morning and entertained us.

Regular Bhajan programmes were also held at Lakshmi Narayan Temple. We paid visits to the Sadbhakti Mandir of Sri Taki Maharaj at Jogeshwari and the famous Sannyas Ashram of Vile Parle, where we had the Darshan of Mahamandleshwar Swami Sri Maheshwaranandji. He treated us with great love. Bhajan was arranged by devotees of Vile Parle and Ramdas enjoyed it in the presence of Swami Maheshwarnandji. Among the visits to various other Mandirs and Ashrams, our visit to Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Khar deserves special mention. Swami Sambuddhanandji, President of the Ashram, had invited us for an evening Bhajan and worship at the Ramakrishna shrine. We sat in front of Sri Ramakrishna's image. There was a large gathering. The Bhajan conducted by the Swamis of the Ashram sent us into divine ecstasies. We sat all through the programme still, serene and blissful.

Another noteworthy programme was the one arranged at Bombay Spiritual Centre, founded by J. H. Cama and his devout associates. Hundreds of people had gathered at the Centre. For want of sufficient accommodation, many visitors had to stand outside the building. D. V. Vyas made a thrilling speech on the occasion about his contact with Ramdas and the experience he had gained thereafter. He also spoke feelingly about Mataji who, on all such occasions, would occupy some inconspicuous

corner along with the other ladies. When the audience heard about her, a loud call came from them for her Darshan: "Mataji, Mataji, we want to see her." She then stood up at the place where she was sitting and coming to the front, sat on the Asan prepared for her. All the assembled friends were supremely happy to behold her and pay their respects to her.

The visit to Asthika Samaj at Matunga was also a memorable one. The Samaj hall was filled to overflowing. Many people stood in the compound and on the footpaths. Murugadas, Ganesh Heblekar and Swami Chinmayananda were the principal singers at the Bhajan. The number of people who gathered on this occasion was estimated to be about 6,000. The name of God rang out through the crowd, producing a wave of joy and bliss in the hearts of all. All glory to His Name!

Who is the greatest of all?

Another day, at the Ivorine, during the morning Bhajan, the famous musician, Master Devendranath, sang a beautiful song, the meaning of which was as follows:

"The question once arose as to who was the greatest of all. One said the earth was the greatest. Another denied it, saying that Mahashesha, the King of Serpents on whose head the earth rests, was greater. Then, the first one retorted: "Not Mahashesha, Shiva is greater, for did He not coil Mahashesha round His neck and chest?" Again, the other one rejoined: "Shiva is not the greatest, but Kailas where He resides is greater." The reply came from the first one: "Kailas is greater than Shiva, but Ravana had shaken Kailas by his powerful arms. So Ravana is the greatest of them." The other said: "Ravana is not great for he was killed by Rama. So, Rama is the greatest." Lastly, to clinch the whole issue, the first one declared emphatically, "Rama is not the greatest, for, a saint is greater than Rama. Rama takes His seat in a saint's heart and makes it His home. So, the saint is the greatest of all."

The musician sang the above song in such a way as to send the audience into raptures which they showed by clapping their hands.

The visit to Madhav Baug was another outstanding event in Ramdas' stay in Bombay. Here, too, thousands of people

assembled in the spacious hall. Ramdas sat on an elevated platform. When the Bhajan started and Ram Nam issued from the throats of thousands of devotees, the atmosphere was thrilling and ecstatic shouts of "Victory to God" rang forth. With difficulty, Mataji and Ramdas got away from the crowd at the close of the function.

A Bhajan was also held at the Kanara Saraswat Association Hall, Talmakiwadi. The hall and the compound were packed with thousands of people long before we arrived for the function. The Vice-President of the Association welcomed us. After the usual prayer and Bhajan by Ganesh Heblekar, D. V. Sabnis gave a short and inspiring discourse on Sri Jnaneswari. Ramdas in a few words invoked the blessings of God on all those who had gathered there. Later, he paid visits to our friends at 'Guruprasad'.

During this visit Ramdas was asked to go to a sculptor's studio at Chowpatty, where he was cordially welcomed by Nilkant Wagh. Ramdas gave a sitting for about an hour for the sculptor to put on finishing touches to the bust of Ramdas. Nilkant Wagh's father had great love and regard for Ramdas. Although not keeping good health, he too was present and manifested rare joy on finding us at his place.

Most of Ramdas' time after the morning Bhajan and before the evening one was spent in rounds of visits to the houses of devotees. Ramdas seemed to be moving about like an ethereal being, flitting from place to place through the air, drawn by the love and devotion of innumerable friends in Bombay. Invitations came, from friends in Ahmedabad, Porbandar, Kandla and Poona. The stay in Bombay was extremely blissful. The next place Ramdas and party visited was Ahmedabad.

XXXII

AHMEDABAD

We reached this industrial city by plane from Bombay. We were the guests of Bansidharbhai, at his residence, "Ram Varsha"

At the invitation of a great saint of Ahmedabad, Punit Maharaj, we attended a function at his Ashram and had lunch with the saint. We also visited the Sabarmati Ashram where we met Chunibhai Bhagat and Nandlal, his disciple. When we went to the Harijan Shala, we were charmed by the welcome accorded to us by the Harijan children, with inspiring songs. The principal, Pratapbhai, was a gifted singer and a great devotee of God.

We also paid a visit to the local Ramakrishna Ashram situated far away from the City. The resident Swamis had arranged a small function consisting of Bhajan and talks on spiritual subjects. At the Sai Baba Mandir in Kalupur, Ramdas had to climb several steps to reach the fourth floor which was fully packed with devotees. Ramdas also met here Swami Advaitanand and Swami Madhava Tirth. Bhajan went on in full swing. There was a short address after the Bhajan.

Then Ramdas went to the temple in which Mahant Ramprasadasji lived. The Mahant used to pay annual visits to our Ashram for several years. He is a saint whose life bears witness to selfless love and devotion towards God and compassion and kindness for all living creatures. We spent some joyful hours in his blessed company.

Visit after visit followed in succession and Ramdas went about the city like a bee in search of honey from flowers. A girl prayed to Ramdas to visit her house even though only for ten minutes. Ramdas and party went to her place. Seeing us in her house, she became so joyous that her face was lit up with bright smiles. She moved about lightly as though she was walking on air. Her devotion was simply wonderful. We also visited a school where Ramdas was accorded a reception so loving that he finds it difficult to describe it in words. The Headmaster said: "Today, for me, is an occasion of great joy and bubbling happiness, crowned with light, love and blessings."

Jayman, the daughter of Ramprasad Dave, asked Ramdas to see a T. B. patient lying seriously ill on the fourth floor of a building. Ramdas' health was not quite up to the mark. Still somehow, on this occasion, he felt drawn by a mysterious

power and ascending the steps rapidly, he saw the emaciated lady, pale and helpless, lying on a cot, eagerly awaiting Ramdas. At the sight of Ramdas, her face brightened and a strange peace settled on it. Ramdas went near her and she bent down her head in salutation. Ramdas stopped with her for five minutes. The visit yielded her immense solace and joy.

Ramdas also visited the old house of Natvarlal Parikh, in which Ramdas had first met Natvarlal's father, Seth Gordhandas, in the front room. We now sat in this room for a while, reviving the memories of that meeting which laid the foundation for continued contact with that family. The Bhajan held at Bansidarbhai's place on the last day was a grand one. Swami Chinmayananda, Pratapbhai and many of the noted singers participated and spread waves of spiritual exaltation among the vast concourse of devotees. All were bathed in an ocean of spiritual bliss and peace.

XXXIII

RAJKOT - BHAVNAGAR

From Ahmedabad Ramdas and party went to Rajkot. We were greeted at the Rajkot airport by Madhavram Raval and other friends of the place. Here Ramdas visited the Rashtriya Shala where Mahatmaji had once fasted on account of some trouble in this State. All kinds of handicrafts were taught to the deaf and dumb in this institution which was run on ideal lines. We also visited at the request of Chhaganlal Joshi of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Harijan Colony, started in the name of Thakkar Bapa. We went to the different sections in the colony where children were tenderly looked after and given suitable education.

At Rajkot Ramdas came into contact with Dhebarbhai, who was then the Chief Minister of Saurashtra. He used to attend the evening Bhajan. His simple and humble nature endeared him to the people of the State. Ramdas is reminded here of the illuminating saying "It is little to know ourselves to be great and great to know ourselves to be little." Master Vasant played an important part in leading all the Bhajans. He created a

highly devotional atmosphere by his inspiring and melodious songs. Altogether, our stay in Rajkot was a delightful one.

From Rajkot we took the plane to Bhavnagar. Here, we were the guests of the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, who was not there at the time. But his personal secretary, G. U. Bhatt, made all arrangements for our stay. At the Bhajan programmes, all the congregated devotees jointly sang Ram Nam with great devotion. Special mention must be made of the Muslim saint Sai Sattar Shah, who was very popular among the Saurashtrians for his serene and peaceful nature, and his soul-elevating Bhajans in Hindi. He used to be present at all the Bhajan programmes and sing to the great delight of the assembled devotees.

During this visit, Gunvantrai Kamdar invited Ramdas to his new residence. Later he built the present Ramdas Ashram, where Ramdas used to stay for about two months every year.

One day we went to a place called Songadh, about 12 miles from Bhavnagar, at the invitation of a great Jain Sadhu, Muni Maharaj Kalyanchandraji. He had started a Gurukul for Jains and a Nature Cure clinic. We had Bhajan programme at his Ashram that was attended by all the resident pupils and patients. The Bhajan went on with great love and devotion. The Sadhu is an elderly person who radiates deep peace. We felt quite exalted in his holy presence.

From Bhavnagar we flew to Bhuj in Kutch, from where Bhai Pratap was to take us to Kandla. In Bhuj, at the Hatkeshwar Temple of Lord Shiva, Satsang and Bhajan were held attended by a large number of devotees. We then started from Bhuj by car to Kandla. Bhai Pratap explained that at that time the Kandla Corporation had in view the construction of 4,000 houses for the occupation mainly of the displaced Sindhi refugees from Pakistan. At the time of our visit only two or three buildings for the use of the engineers and the workmen had been built. We stayed in one of these. When Ramdas next visited Kandla a few years later, he found the colony had on it built two townships, containing more than 7,000 to 8,000 houses. A wonderful transformation indeed! From Kandla, we proceeded to Porbandar by air via Rajkot.

XXXIV

PORBANDAR

On alighting at the Porbandar airport, it was a joy to see the tall stately figure of the Maharaja with his smiling face and the inevitable stick in his hand which has made history, welcoming us, with a heart overflowing with devotion. There was also a large gathering at the airport to receive us. We were taken to the city and comfortably lodged in the Lal Bungalow.

On the evening of our arrival, Ramdas was taken to perform the opening function of the Rupaliba Gardens. It was a huge function, attended by thousands of ladies and gentlemen. Rajaratna Nanji Kalidas Mehta had generously taken up the work of laying out a park and garden on the site for public use. As requested, Ramdas opened the main gateway to this vast plot enclosed by high walls. The entire programme was so beautifully arranged that the functions went off without any hitch. Every one sat in their places, quiet and calm. There was soul-stirring Bhajan followed by speeches. Ramdas and party sat on a specially constructed platform, with artistic arches and domes.

The next event of importance was our visit to Kabir Ashram, presided over by Sant Ramswarupdasji. This Ashram has a shrine room in which is installed the image of Saint Kabir made in white marble. The Mahant is a great devotee of Kabir. His shining face, with a full beard, reflected the beauty and lustre of his devotion. There was a large gathering on the occasion and devout souls sang inspiring verses. Some speeches conveyed to the audience the greatness of the service rendered by the Kabir Ashram. Kabir, as we all know, was a famous Muslim saint, who received initiation of Ram Nam in a strange way from Swami Ramanand. This was hundreds of years ago. Kabir's songs are still popular all over India. His faith and devotion were unparalleled. His reliance on the power of Ram Nam, as taught in his songs, has electrified the hearts of millions and awakened in them an ardent love for His Name.

From Kabir Ashram we proceeded to the Griha Udyoga - a colony started by the Maharaja of Porbandar for the benefit of

the country weavers. Beautifully designed cloth was made on the looms in this colony. We were treated with great love and devotion by the weavers and their families. Next, we visited the village Kambhodar where the villagers had assembled to greet us. A Bhajan programme was conducted in which the villagers joined heartily singing, in their melodious voices, inspiring names of God. Wherever we went, Bhajans were held and the greatness of God's Name was spread extensively. The Name rang in the hearts of the congregations. The humble life mission of Ramdas was being fulfilled in a marvellous way.

The programme at the Gita Mandir, attended by a large number of people, included Bhajan, Kirtan and speeches. Ramdas cannot forget the bubbling enthusiasm, the bright faces, the emotional outbursts of the devotees here. Ramdas was taken by Gunvantrai Kamdar to his house. He and his family welcomed us with great love. Gunvantrai is a great industrialist and comes from a devout family. His expensive charities are wellknown.

Our visit to Sudama Mandir was another memorable event. Sudama was an ideal devotee of Sri Krishna. We remember how Sudama walked all the way from Sudamapuri, the present Porbandar, to Dwaraka and having met Lord Krishna, his Gurubhai, his childhood chum and playmate, was drowned in ecstasy. The Bhagavata describes how they embraced each other with overflowing love and affection, and what devotional feelings flooded the hearts of all in the palace, who witnessed this rare contact of the Bhagavan and His Bhakta. The very thought of this great occasion sends a current of rapture in our hearts. Bhajan was held in front of Sudama Mandir, attended by a large number of people. All glory to Sri Krishna and Sudama!

Another important visit was to the Arya Kanya Gurukul started by Rajaratna Nanji Kalidas Mehta. It is an outstanding institution for imparting the right kind of education to girls - education based on religious training as enunciated by the great Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj movement. Dayanand Saraswati's name and fame has spread all over India. He is a great religious leader who has interpreted the Vedas in an original way so that the superstitious beliefs and practices obtaining in the socio-religious organization in India

might be replaced by a true religious feeling and a sense of universal brotherhood. He has condemned idol worship done in a mechanical way and broken down distinctions created by the caste system, which divided society into water-tight compartments, leading to discord and dissensions.

We witnessed an interesting drama enacted at the Kanya Gurukul on Mahatmaji and his associates, the scene being laid in heaven. We also paid a visit to the Experimental Agricultural Farm at Khapat at the request of the Agricultural Expert. Mataji and Ramdas planted two mango seedlings in this farm.

When we visited the Raj Mahal (Royal Palace), we saw there an old lady of 105 years who was a relation of the Maharaja. She was sitting on a cot laughing all the while. At her age, she had, of course, no interest in the life that was going on around her. In fact, she was living in a world of her own. She might be said to have been passing through her second childhood, as it were. Ramdas went to her and sat by her side. She smiled at Ramdas, opening her toothless mouth, and with an affectionate movement, she touched Ramdas' forehead with her forehead. Mataji and other lookers-on were simply charmed at the sight and a wave of cheer and delight rose in our hearts.

Another noteworthy event was our visit to Kirti Mandir founded by Seth Nanji Kalidas Mehta. It was a red monument built to immortalize the name of Mahatmaji. The edifice was unfinished at the time. We went to the place again after the construction was completed. On this occasion, we had the supreme privilege of entering the old house belonging to Gandhiji's father, in which Mahatmaji was born. We went all over the place, both on the ground and upper floors and stood silent in prayerful mood before the hallowed ground where Mahatmaji was born. It was a heart-stirring experience which cannot easily be forgotten. Thereafter, we visited many other institutions, temples, schools and societies, where we were accorded a uniformly hearty welcome and kind treatment.

When we were once returning to the City after visiting the devout people in the various villages round about Porbandar, the Maharaja who was at the steering wheel had to suddenly stop the car when a kisan (farmer) ran up to us from the fields. We

waited for the farmer. He came up directly to Ramdas and told him in rural Gujarati: "O Bhagvan! grant our Maharaja God-realization." He said this in a most appealing tone and then left immediately.

The day of departure from Porbandar came. We emplaned at the airport, where a large number of Porbandar devotees had assembled to give us a jolly send-off. The plane made straight for Bombay. Mataji expressed great admiration for the devotion of the Porbandar friends towards Ramdas and remarked that as Porbandar, known also as Sudamapuri, was the birthplace of the great Bhakta Sudama, it had been endowed with unique love and devotion for saints.

XXXV

BOMBAY - POONA

Reaching Bombay we went directly from the airport to Ramdas Nivas at Khar. Sundar Rao and Appibai were happy to have us at their place. From Khar, we proceeded to Poona, as the guests of D. V. Vyas. When we arrived in Poona, it was raining heavily.

Our host's bungalow now became a scene of Bhajan gatherings and spiritual talks. A party of Sindhi friends came with a Bhajan party and contributed to the brightening up of the atmosphere by their sweet and inspiring chanting of God's names. We met here our old friends like Motiram B. Advani, B. V. Deshmukh and others. One day a party of Maharashtra singers performed Bhajan in the Pandharpur style with cymbals and violin. They sang the songs of Tukaram, Eknath and Namdev, which set up a current of spiritual love and devotion.

One joyful item in our programme at Poona was a visit to Sadhu T. L. Vaswani at his residence. Ramdas had met him before at Karachi. There our friendship had been sealed by a private interview in which we opened our hearts to each other. So it was no small happiness for Ramdas to have his Darshan again at Poona. Accompanied by D. V. Vyas, Ramdas went to see him and spent some blissful time in his holy company.

From Poona we returned to Bombay, this time stopping with Natvarlal Parikh at 'Ivorine'. Here, again, a regular programme of Bhajan was held morning and evening. There was a continuous flow of visitors, who crowded in all the rooms. They forgot themselves in Ramdas' company and had to be persuaded to leave 'Ivorine' for their homes.

A Bhajan followed by a meeting was held at the University Convocation Hall. The hall rang with the sweet chanting of Ram Nam sung by Swami Chinmayananda. Then, a volley of questions was directed at Ramdas through Prof. J. N. Chubb. One day Prince Pratapsinh came to see Ramdas at 'Ivorine', his health having greatly improved. Ramdas was happy to see him. The next place to be visited was Hyderabad, where Ramdas had promised to be at the request of the devotees who enacted the memorable scene, described earlier, at the Hakimpet airport.

XXXVI

HYDERABAD AND MADRAS

At Hyderabad Ramdas and party stopped with Justice Suryanarayan Rao, one of the Justices of the Hyderabad High Court. We were taken to his place in a well-decorated car, devotees singing Ram Nam all the way. As we entered the bungalow, we were charmed to hear the recitation from Vedas by students and teachers of a Sanskrit Pathashala. The house in which we lived was the scene of continuous bustle caused by the incoming and outgoing stream of devotees. Even at nights, most of the visitors slept in the bungalow, occupying every inch of space. Poor Suryanarayan Rao had his bed and pillow once taken away by somebody and had to content himself by lying down on the bare floor with a stout law book for his pillow.

Among the visitors at Suryanarayan Rao's house, special mention has to be made of Swami Ramanand Tirth, Baba Purandas and Swami Madhav Tirth. Swami Ramanand Tirth is a well known Congress leader who had selflessly fought for the liberation of India from British rule. Ramdas had known him from the time he met him at Mominabad during his visit to that place in 1938. Even before that, Ramdas had known

him through correspondence. There was also a function at the residence of M. G. Krishna Rao, where the Anandashram Branch Bhajans and meetings used to be held.

Responding to the invitation of Rani Barkhat Rai, one day Ramdas paid a visit to the Gita Pracharini Sabha, where a big function was arranged including Bhajan and presentation of prizes to the school-children.

We had occasion also to go to the Udasi Math where Baba Purandas lived. From his Math, we were taken in a procession to the place where a big Yagna was performed. There was an unusually large gathering at this place. Baba Purandas spoke a few words to the assembly about Ramdas.

There was a huge gathering at Gaulipura also, when Ramdas went for Darshan at the Balaji Temple. The enthusiasm of the crowd crossed all bounds resulting in chaos and stampede. Ramdas asked the devotees to take to Ram Nam to control their Tamasic and Rajasic natures which caused such wild and violent behaviour. They promised to do what Ramdas told them and said they would behave better when Ramdas came to them the next time.

A similar scene was repeated at another place where those who escorted Ramdas and Mataji had a most difficult time to guard them from the crowds of devotees rushing from all sides for touching their feet. It was only after great struggle that we reached our car. In the melce Suryanarayan Rao got many blows, his body was bruised and shirt torn to shreds. He bore all this patiently with stoic spirit. We returned home quietly without exchanging one word among ourselves, ruminating over the pandemonium. The most serene at the time among us was Suryanarayan Rao, a man of extraordinary patience and exemplary devotion. He was generous to a fault and his love for all those who came to see Ramdas and Mataji, and those who sang Bhajans in our presence, was boundless. He possessed a faith which could, as the saying goes, move mountains. He was peerless as a host. All those who came to see us at his place were treated by him with utmost care, affection and kindness.

One day Ramdas visited the new Arts College opposite the Osmania University buildings. It was a magnificent structure, made of huge granite slabs. Owing to the delay at the houses of devotees, Ramdas arrived at the college late at 6 p.m., two hours behind schedule. Shivmohanlal, a professor of the college, took Ramdas around with great love and devotion. It was a holiday; so we did not meet the students. Shivmohanlal is a great follower of Sri Aurobindo. Whenever he came to see Ramdas, he would gaze at him with rapture, his face lit up with a broad smile. Ramdas even now remembers the soft touches of his big hands on Ramdas' feet. When Ramdas went to his bungalow, he was actually cuddled and fondled by him.

Another day, the Central Prison was visited in response to the invitation of the Superintendent of the prison, a Sindhi devotee. We saw the prisoners engaged in making carpets that have gained wide-spread fame for their attractive designs and durability.

From Hyderabad, we flew to Madras. At the airport, we were met by our host, Dr. S. R. U. Savoor and other friends. There was the usual programme of daily Bhajan and talks. One day Ramdas visited the Punjabi Association where in the open maidan a huge gathering was present. The Punjabi friends performed a grand Bhajan. Ramdas attended also several other functions at various centres such as the Ramakrishna Mission, Gujarat Mandal, Mahila Samaj, and the Spiritual Centre. At every place, there were Bhajans by devotees followed by speeches. The visit to the Hindu Theological High School deserves special mention. Here the Headmaster presented Ramdas to the students who are given regular spiritual instruction in addition to the normal course. The atmosphere in the school is therefore pure and elevating. At the instance of the Headmaster, Ramdas unveiled a picture of Goddess Saraswati in one of the school halls, the students chanting the Veda-mantras.

Mataji's birthday which came off at this time of the year was celebrated by the devotees in the Sri Ramakrishna Mission High School hall at Mambalam. The function was attended by a large number of people. There was prolonged Bhajan followed by speeches in English and Tamil. It was a grand occasion.

Special mention may be made of the long and inspiring speech on Mataji by Balayogi, a young Sadhu who is held in high esteem by all who know him.

After Bhajan, daily, there used to be a period set apart for questions and answers. A few of the questions asked by the Madras friends and answered by Ramdas are given below:

Q: How to cultivate love for God?

Ramdas: By contact of saints. By their grace, love for God is awakened in your hearts. They teach you the path that leads to Him.

Q: Where can we have saints?

Ramdas: If you have a real thirst for their company, you will certainly get it. What is needed is a true and intense aspiration for God.

Q: How are we to recognize that a saint has realized God?

Ramdas: You cannot know a saint by merely seeing him from without. This is very difficult. Still, there are some signs by which you can know him. You can intuitively feel his elevating influence when you are with him. A saint is like a spiritual dynamo. A touch of his kindles in you spiritual life and power.

Q: What is the highest Bhakti?

Ramdas: There are two kinds of Bhakti; Sakama and Nishkama Bhakti. Nishkama Bhakti is the highest Bhakti.

Q: What is the easiest way to have Bhakti while living in the world?

Ramdas: By taking God's Name, you will develop Bhakti. Then, even when you are active in the world, your mind will be with God. Sri Ramakrishna says: "With one hand work in the world and with the other, hold on to the feet of God. When your work in the world is finished, place both hands at His feet."

Q: Should we teach religion in the schools and colleges to our children?

Ramdas: Religion must be taught in the schools, based on broad and universal lines. In other words, they must be taught the essentials of all religions which are one and the same.

Q: Why does Swamiji not organize Bhajan and Sankirtans everywhere?

Ramdas: Ramdas goes about inspiring people to hold Bhajan and Kirtan. Truly devotional people will gather together and form Kirtan parties for singing God's names, learning to love each other as children of the same one God - the Divine father and mother.

Q: Is there any particular time for meditation?

Ramdas: Any time will do, according to one's convenience, but early morning and evening times are considered to be most suitable.

Q: What is the best method?

Ramdas: Chanting God's Name and mentally thinking on the attributes of God. As you think more and more of Him, your life will be transformed in such a manner that you will enjoy the pure love and bliss of God.

Q: Swamiji, we feel overwhelmed.

Ramdas. Why not leave everything to Him? Your efforts, you will know after some struggle, are fruitless. Surrender to Him and you become free. Surrender does not mean inaction. Surrender is action done on a Divine plane.

Q: Are we to renounce our families?

Ramdas: No, look upon the family as the manifestation of God.

One day Ramdas paid a visit to Chromepet and stopped for a day at D. Appa Rao's garden house. In the course of talks here, Ramdas spoke on the ideal of Brahmacharya. He said: "A true Brahmachari is he who keeps his mind perfectly pure, that is, free from the sex idea, even when he is living in the world. He looks upon all women as manifestations of the Divine Mother. A true Brahmachari, who is radiant with

Brahma Tejas, brings peace and solace to thousands of people." Mataji and Ramdas were asked to plant here seedlings, which we since learn, are flourishing very well, having grown up into beautiful trees.

Ramdas also paid a visit to Hanumayamma's house where we were asked to enter the shrine room. It was indeed a holy place where she held her daily prayers and worship. Her whole life is imbued with faith and by its power she has achieved almost whatever she has aspired for. Her belief in the power of God's name is unique.

Mention may also be made here about Ramdas' visit to the house of Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi, the famous singer. Ramdas was taken here by Sarangapani Mudaliar. She was kind enough to sing some Bhajan songs on the occasion, accompanied by Tambura, in her inimitable melodious voice. She and her husband were all kindness and love.

We also went to the house of T. G. Loganathan, an ardent devotee. He had made elaborate arrangements at his house to receive Ramdas. He had invited also many Madras devotees. Bhajan held here was marked by great devotion and joy. Dr. G. S. Katre's place was also visited on another day. Dr. Katre used to be Ramdas' host when he touched Madras on the previous occasions. Indeed, he is a pure and loving devotee, simple in his ways. He served the Ramakrishna Dispensary as an Honorary Doctor for many years.

On this occasion of Ramdas' visit to Madras, a benefit show was held in aid of Sri Krishna Vidyalaya at the Bharat Talkies. The film shown was the story of Mirabai. Mataji and Ramdas attended the show. Another benefit performance in aid of the Vidyalaya was arranged at Bangalore by the friends there led by R. Manickam. It was a music concert by Thyagaraja Bhagavathar, the wellknown musician of the South. Only Mataji and Ramdas and one or two others went by plane to Bangalore. The rest of the party travelled straight from Madras to Coimbatore by train. At Bangalore, Ramdas stayed with Sarangapani Mudaliar. The concert took place in the Town hall and Thyagaraja Bhagavathar was at his best. After a visit to a few places, we left for Coimbatore by air.

XXXVII

CALICUT - CANNANORE

The first place we visited on landing at Coimbatore was the Seva Ashram of Swami Gurubrahmananda. After prayer and Bhajan, we proceeded to the bungalow of Venkatapathy Naidu, which was at a short distance from the Seva Ashram. A regular programme drawn up beforehand, of visits to various houses, schools and Ashrams, was gone through in quick succession. Later, we stayed with Damodarswamy Naidu at his newly-built house. Wherever we went, Bhajan programmes were held, attended by a large concourse of people. It was a joy to note God's Name instilled into the hearts of the people.

Damodarswamy Naidu was known to us from a long time and had paid frequent visits to the Ashram. Although he was the manager of a cotton mill, he lived an austere life, marked by devotional practices. He has a quiet and kindly nature. We had a blissful time as his guests.

From Coimbatore we travelled by car to Palghat where a Bhajan was held at the Gowder Mahal. After refreshments, we left the place for Calicut, where we were the guests of Ishwarlal Shroff. Here we visited the Nayanar Children's Home, an institution that took care of the helpless orphans and derelict children, and also elderly people who were mentally weak or too old to work. Very good work was done here by K. N. Kurup and his wife who had dedicated their lives to the service of Daridra Narayanas. The next item in the programme at Calicut was a function at the Zamorin's College. The hall was crowded by thousands of people. After Bhajan, speeches were delivered by some friends. When accepting the invitation Ramdas had told the convenors that he would not be able to deliver any speech. But, towards the close of the function, one of the convenors, a prominent vakil of that place, came to Ramdas and whispered into his ears: "Swamiji, we would like to hear a few words from your mouth. We do not want a speech or a lecture, but only a few words. The audience, especially the mothers, are keen on hearing your voice. A few sentences spoken by you will satisfy them."

Ramdas rose and said: "God-realization is the goal of life. Surrender is the way. Repetition of God's Name is the surest means of effecting such a surrender. That is all." After this brief speech which must have satisfied the dear friends who wanted to hear his voice, Ramdas got up and left the hall.

The next meeting attended was one specially arranged at the Divine Life Society where sweet devotional songs were sung by the ladies. We were also present at the evening Bhajan in the local Ramakrishna Mission School. It is situated in a large compound at Kallai, a mile away from Calicut. The atmosphere here was calm, pure and holy. Such religious centres do possess a spiritually surcharged atmosphere wherein those who are weighed down by worldly worries find solace and relief.

Another memorable event was our visit to the premises of the Calicut Buddhist Mission. The monk in charge, whom we knew intimately, as he had come to Anandashram more than once, accorded us a hearty welcome. We went round the buildings and offered our homage to the Buddha whose image graced the shrine room in the premises.

Ramdas may relate here the following. Once when this Buddhist monk came to Anandashram, he sat for our daily Bhajan and afterwards suggested to Ramdas: "Swamiji, towards the close of the Bhajan, in the Arati prayer you all sing 'Hare Ram, Hare Ram, Ram Ram, Hare Hare, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare.' Why not add to it one more line, 'Hare Buddha, Hare Buddha, Buddha Buddha, Hare Hare'!" His words made a deep impression on Ramdas and it was thereafter that we added this line also to our daily prayer.

From Calicut, we came to Cannanore by train. Here, we stayed with D. D. Joshi, a highly-evolved devotee, who is the head of a group of spiritual aspirants of the place. They conduct their periodical Bhajans at Joshi's house. On the evening of our arrival a Bhajan programme was held in the Gujarati Vidya Mandir, where we also witnessed a Garba dance by small girls of the Gujarati community. Bhajans were also held in the Town Hall in the mornings and in the Commercial Textile Corporation in the evenings.

One day we visited the seashore and enjoyed the beautiful view of the sea, its waves rising and falling as the thoughts of one who has no control over his mind. The beauty of the sunset gave us a strange ecstasy which can be better experienced than expressed. Joshi and his friends made our stay at their place perfectly comfortable. The ladies in the house vied with one another in serving us with all love and kindness.

From Cannanore, we returned to the Ashram, after an absence of three and a half months. On account of Mataji's personal attention, during this tour Ramdas' health was properly preserved and it was all that could be desired at the end of the arduous travels.

END OF 1949 TOUR.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After receiving initiation of the *Ram Mantra* from his father, Swami Ramdas, who was then known as Vittal Rao, renounced the worldly life in 1922 and wandered as a mendicant Sadhu all over India and in the Himalayas, in a frenzy of God-intoxication, with the holy and all-powerful *Ram Mantra* ever on his tongue and with God as his only refuge and guide. His was the completest surrender to the Will of God.

Many years of wandering life brought him finally back to South Kanara. Having attained spiritual liberation and God-vision, he started his mission to guide and serve mankind in order to awaken it to the awareness of God. He founded an Ashram—named Anandashram—near Kanhangad, North Kerala, which is fostered by love and care by Mother Krishna-bai, his foremost disciple and a Self-realised soul.

Swami Ramdas' writings come from the deeps of Reality and therefore go straight to the heart. In 1954, he and Mother Krishnabai went on a world tour and hundreds of their devotees, friends, and admirers, who had loved and venerated them from a distance, had a chance to come into close contact with them. Since the last FIVE decades Anandashram has been a powerful spiritual beacon, and thousands have been constantly visiting it, carrying home with them the torch of Light, Love and Service lit at the feet of the great Master.

Swami Ramdas attained *mahanirvana* in July 1963.